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HOW TO WRITE FICTION

Especially

THE ART OF SHORT STORY WRITING

A Practical Course of Instruction

After the French Method of Maupassant

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Charles T. Dillingham & Co.

Sherwin
Cody

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PREFACE.

Of all the audacious things of which a literary man may be guilty, probably nothing will appear to his brother authors quite so audacious as an attempt to reduce the art of fiction to rules and a system. The very word "rules" is hateful to the truly literary soul, and even the vague suggestion of them without the actual use of the word rouses a storm of rebellion. To reveal the fact that the grand climax is a trick and style may be a clever catching of phrases seems perfidy of the rankest type, even if such a culpable revelation is a possibility in the very nature of things. But it has been a mystery fetish, closely hugged, that the art of literature is so elusive that there is no possibility of formulating it or teaching it to another. Little by little in recent times, to be sure, that fetish has been attacked by the temerarious, and with decided results. Walter Besant has innocently done much to destroy it, and possibly might have quite succeeded had not Henry James come fiercely to the rescue. The Society of Authors and the review editors have done their share in helping on the growing spirit of enlightenment. But still the opinion is generally prevalent that the art of fiction is a thousand times more volatile and evanescent than the art of painting (which has its distinct schools), and the art of music (which is taught in conservatories), and the art of sculpture, which

is not considered impossible to learn in spite of the fact that no one since Phidias has caught his enchanting grace.

The present writer realizes all this as he ventures to offer the public a general guide to the successful practice of the gentlest of arts. He remembers the saying that "fools rush in where angels fear to tread," and the unhappy application which might be made of it to himself; but he would seek his defence in suggesting that the proverb is also true of children, and he confides to the believing reader that it was after their manner that he slipped into his attitude of audacity. He is not the author of very many great short stories, but circumstances have made him conscious of the needs of a number of modest though eager beginners, and to help them he formulated a few principles from such masters of the art of short story writing as Maupassant. The enthusiasm with which they received his suggestions and rules, and the successful use they made of them, led him unwittingly on until he had written a book, which is contained in the following pages. In presenting what he has to say he expressly deprecates any interest from the critics, who will be sure to disagree, but offers himself to the innocent and unsuspecting aspirant to be used as he may be found useful, and to be left with indulgent indifference when his usefulness shall have passed.

THE ART OF SHORT STORY WRITING.

INTRODUCTION.

Most young writers imagine when they first think of writing short stories that one writes well or ill by nature, and if one does not write well in the first place improvement is a matter of chance or the working out of inherent ability in some blind way. That the art of short story writing is something that can be learned seems not yet to have suggested itself very practically to authors or critics. Yet Maupassant studied seven years with Flaubert before he began to print at all, with the result of a very obvious skill, and this suggests the possibility that others also can learn the art. But any writer young or old who has gone to an acknowledged master of literature in order to get instruction knows how little practical assistance is commonly obtained. There are bureaus of revision and advice, which have made some pretensions beyond merely telling the young author whether his work is saleable or not, and where he may hope to dispose of it. But none of them have been successful in much more than the mechanical and business part.

I.

If we are going to do more than amuse ourselves with writing, we shall find it

necessary a long and arduous course of study of the art of it. Most successful writers work out this training alone, in the face of many discouragements, and after years of struggle. Those who have succeeded without it have commonly attained only a temporary and fleeting success. Those who have succeeded in other arts sometimes begin to write when they are well advanced in years, and succeed from the start, as Du Maurier has done. It is not to be supposed, however, that even Du Maurier can become a great literary artist without considerable hard work and arduous endeavor. But Du Maurier, beginning to write at his age, will naturally not waste so much of his energy in unnecessary directions, as a younger man would do.

But the young can seldom, if ever, attain great and permanent success, even if by peculiar personal brilliancy they attain a fleeting one, except by an apprenticeship either to some master or to the masterpieces of literature, for the very reason that literature analyzes the emotions, and the emotions are the last part of ourselves which we come to control or understand, and mastery of the emotions is the most difficult thing in all life. A young person when he begins to write has that whole side of his nature to learn about and bring under subservience, while one older has the advantage of having mastered himself more fully in that direction. In order to succeed as a writer, therefore, it

becomes necessary in the case of the young : to study and master the psychology of the emotions and the motives of human action. This opens an enormously wide field, and one of which very little is yet known even to the learned. Zola is perhaps the only one who has formulated the theory that the art of fiction must be based on a scientific study of human nature, but his dicta are only a crystalization of what Balzac and Flaubert and Maupassant and the Goncourts thought when they produced their own work and verbally said to each other in friendly discussions.

Perhaps the reader may say at this point, "Then your book is the discussion of a new theory, a polemic for the critics, not a practical formulation of principles already well known in the literary world?"

It is true that successful English writers up to this time have never become successful writers by applying the theory that the art of fiction must be based on the scientific study of human nature. The poets have depended on natural inspiration and the hints they could get intuitively from studying literature. Writers of fiction have learned what they have learned by the intuitive method in reading those who were masters. A novelist reads all the other novelists, and then writes a novel more or less like theirs as well as he can. An essay

writer reads all the other essayists, and then writes essays as well as he can on the models he has, with original modifications. But to say, "Young man, read literature," is like saying, "Young man, go west," without pointing out the road by which he should go. There never has been any definite road, every writer has struck out for himself, just as the pioneers of our own country struck out singly or in parties to penetrate the wilderness toward the west. They all knew enough to go westward, but they had a decidedly hard time of it because there was no road to go on. This theory is an effort to build a road in the direction of literary art to which any adviser can point and say, "You had best follow that road, young man. It leads in the direction you wish to go and is much easier to travel than the open fields."

If the road is really built, no doubt thousands of people will find it possible to go toward literary art where now only a few can encure to the end, even if they have courage to set out, just as thousands of people go west on the railways and steamships, where only a few could go across the plains in wagons when there were not even trails.

The French are the most artistic people in the world, and we Americans turn toward them most naturally for guidance. Maupassant has written most successfully according to the scientific method of short story writing, and in this volume we shall constantly follow him as a model.

Zola has formulated the theory, however,- that is, the broad theory of basing the writing of fiction on a scientific study of human nature. Referring to Zola's book "The Experimental Novel" let us as an introduction give the general theory of the relation of scientific study to art. After this general statement we shall confine ourselves to more practical details.

II.

First, what is the "scientific method" as applied to anything, whether physiology or novel writing?

Zola says the scientific method is this: You observe something,--for instance, that women weep when they are particularly pleased. On that observation you form a general hypothesis, perhaps that excess of emotion, whether unhappy or pleasurable, overcomes will and self-control. Having formed that hypothesis from the well known fact that women weep when they are unhappy and the single observation of a woman weeping when she should be particularly happy, you proceed to verify your general hypothesis by other observations of the same kind, until at last you have a mass of evidence which more or less fully establishes the law, and you say you have a theory. A theory, we may add, is an hypothesis as fully established as

circumstances will admit, a law is a theory which is established beyond the least doubt. For instance, gravitation is a law, the existence of such things as atoms and molecules is a theory. As Zola expresses it over and over again, you proceed from the known to the unknown, verifying every step. Experiment is the way in which you verify every step,--you try the theory on. It does not matter in the least whether you do it in a laboratory where you can put two chemical substances together and get what is technically called a reaction, or in the realm of human nature, where you try the theory that excess of emotion destroys self-control by applying it to all sorts of cases, for instance men becoming uncontrollable through excessive anger as well as women weeping hysterically under excessive sorrow or excessive joy. The chemist has things more or less in his own hands, for he can take his two substances and put them together. The experimenter on human nature has a more difficult task, because he must wait for his circumstances to turn up accidentally in most cases. But the real experiment is not in putting the two things together and trying to observe what will happen, but applying the hypothesis to the case in hand, whatever it may be, in order to see if the hypothesis holds good. There is no scientific experiment in merely putting two chemical substances together

to see what will happen. That is what the alchemists did. Modern scientific chemistry puts two substances together in order to demonstrate a law. If the hypothesis is really a law, the experimenter knows beforehand just what will happen when the two substances are put together, and when he has put his substances together and the thing he prophesied does happen, the experiment has been a success. If something else happens, however interesting that something else may be, the experiment as an experiment has been a failure.

Now let us apply this to novel writing, or rather to the study of human passions. It was very naive of a certain reviewer to suppose that Zola meant that in a novel you put two imaginary people together and see what they will do, just as a child puts potassium on water to see it burn. Zola distinctly says that the book that is written is the report of the experiment. The experiment is tried on human life. For instance, the chief theory in Zola's Rougon-Macquart series of novels is that heredity determines human life so absolutely that no individual can get away from it. He takes this theory (and also a multitude of other theories) and proceeds about collecting evidence, or making experiments. He observes this fact here, that fact there. We say "observes", for observation, he insists, must always go hand in

hand with theory. The experimental method, he says, is observation working hand in hand with an hypothesis. Observation working alone is quite a different thing from observation applied to the demonstration of a law. Above we have mentioned the theory Zola would establish. He goes out into the world and observes a multitude of facts about various people. When he has observed enough he takes the facts and puts them together into a regular series. He creates characters out of his observations. His characters are little more than a mass of observations fused together by the white heat of his personality. Each one of the facts that has gone to make up a character may be verified. Will such a person under such circumstances do so and so? If you wish to be sure, go out into the world and look. If you find them doing the contrary, you say Zola has made a mistake. The scientific novel differs from poetry in just this, that every fact can be verified, while in poetry it is difficult to separate the actual from the fanciful.

In his novel Zola has arranged all his observations in such a way that you can see their bearing on his theory. The novel is the report of his experiments. He does not put his imaginary characters together to see what they will do. He knows what they must do before he puts them together. If when he puts them

together they do easily and naturally what he claimed, one must admit that he is a true prophet, that he has demonstrated his hypothesis. The novel is the carefully arranged report of a multitude of experiments, organized and systematized so as to show clearly the relations of each part to each part.

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You may say this is all very well for theory, but how about the real novel that we have? This may do well enough for the psychologist, but the novelist is a very different person. This certainly is not the way poetry is written, and we had supposed that the novel and poetry were pretty nearly of kin. How, then, do you apply your theory to the real, actual novel which we read every day, and with which we amuse ourselves?

Zola says distinctly that there are poets and scientific novelists (we use "scientific" instead of "naturalistic" because the former word conveys to us more nearly Zola's real meaning). Up to the present century poetry, romanticism, has filled the field of letters. Homer and Shakespere indeed were in the very fullness of their genius writers after the scientific method. But the scientific method was never consciously applied until Balzac. In his first essay Zola quotes Claude Bernard, the physiological scientist, whose book entitled "Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine" he uses as a parallel for dis-

cussing the novel. Claude Bernard is a savant, a pure man of science, and he applies the scientific method to medicine in his book just as Zola would apply this method to the study of human passions, or novel writing. But Claude Bernard says, "In art and letters personality dominates everything. There one is dealing with a spontaneous creation of the mind that has nothing in common with the verification of natural phenomena, in which our minds can create nothing." The reviewer before mentioned says this is the fact and Zola does not disprove it. Zola himself says this is the fact regarding the writers of the romantic school, but Balzac and his successors have been trying to raise the novel out of the slough of mere fancy on to a level with true science, and he as a novelist wishes to be considered as much a savant as Claude Bernard is as a physiologist.

No doubt Zola goes too far in his insistence upon the novel being treated as pure science, for the novel itself is pure art, and it is only the preparatory study of human nature that can be looked upon as pure science. The succeeding volume is devoted to the art, but as the student proceeds from page to page he will see how necessary a scientific knowledge of human nature is at every point, whether in testing his own capacity or in knowing how to adapt him-

self to his readers, or in elaborating a natural and truly human plot.

III.

This opens an enormous field of study, but each student of literary art must determine for himself how much of the scientific study of human nature he is going to do as a groundwork for his own stories. He will have to do some, and no doubt will wish to. If he does a very little he may write a very few short stories; if he does more he can write a larger number of stories or a novel; if he does a great deal he can write several scores of short stories or several novels. But after he has written one good short story, he cannot expect to write another unless he has more genuine material, and he cannot expect to go on writing short stories indefinitely without a corresponding effort in collecting fresh knowledge of human nature. The old knowledge cannot be used over and over indefinitely. There are a great many writers who start out in the magazines with a few brilliant and interesting short stories. Then a few are printed on the strength of their first reputation which are not so brilliant, and then they gradually lose their public, the editors get tired of them, and the reader hears their names no more until one or two of their first short stories are reprinted in some collection, and he wonders what has become

of the authors. Every book reviewer of more than two years experience has seen at least a half dozen writers, mostly young women who had been taken up by some large magazine, drop out of sight just because they had exhausted their store. The young writer who is going to travel the difficult road to literary art should consider this well before starting.

But literary art is something very distinct from literary science. In Zola's "experimental novel" there is no experiment in the book itself. The experimenting was all done on real people before the author began to write the novel. When he began to write he left science and took up art. At this point we will leave science and take up art. Zola puts all his emphasis on the scientific basis of fiction as science, and apparently forgets that he is wholly dependent on art for the expression of his scientific observations. So in leaving science let us leave Zola and look to Maupassant, who in the stories of "The Odd Number" so well illustrates the principles of literary art as art.

We define art as a process of moving people's emotions, and by emotions we mean simply that part of the human mind which works spontaneously and unconsciously as distinguished from the conscious, reasoning part of the mind. When one reads a story that is perfectly artistic,

or sees a beautiful painting, or beholds a Greek statue, he receives an impression, not a theory. He may be led to theorize about his impression afterward, but there is no theory in a work of art. We all know how little able the critics are to make out Shakespere's opinions from his plays, and they have almost concluded that he had no opinions. Perhaps the fewer opinions as such which an artist has, except opinions about how to be artistic, the better for his art. The public is like a child. It wants to be moved emotionally or unconsciously. At its best it is merely receptive. If you can wake it up, if you can make it laugh or cry or love or hate, by your work of art, then you are a successful artist. If you try to make your readers theorize, or to reason with them, your work of art is not successful as a work of art, however excellent it may be as philosophy. When people read your story they must feel an effect. If they feel nothing there is no art. That is why we say art is a process of moving the emotions. As a matter of fact, the world is governed by its emotions, not its principles of living or its religion or its political conclusions, or anything else of the nature of reason. It acts as it feels, that is, it is governed by its emotions. Philosophers agree in this, and common sense people cannot help observing it in life, however loth they are to admit it for themselves. When we write a story we

must try to play upon the emotions of our readers. It happens that all people have the same kinds of emotions which act in the same ways, each in a different proportion, but still all the same. Emotions are also governed by laws, and if you understand these laws you may pull the strings and work the emotions, provided you are clever enough to do it.

A story writer is something like an actor in a theatre, only he must produce the scenery as well as the facial expressions, and throw an atmosphere over everything. The actor forgets himself in thinking of the effect he is producing on his audience, and the writer must learn to do the same thing. To write blindly, hoping for the best, is very bad art indeed. A literary artist must think of his readers first and foremost. He must know what they are thinking, what they are feeling, and, adapting himself to their moods and needs he must do what they will like to have him do (that is to say, they must like it well enough to read his books, after which it does not matter). Young writers think so much more of themselves than of their readers as a usual thing, that of course they do not produce much effect, for one cannot expect to move people very much by going at it hit or miss. The effective man always sees at what he is aiming, and then strikes straight and true.

This brings us to our first practical

point. Controlling other people's emotions is just like controlling your own. If you cannot control your own, you cannot control those of any one else. For instance, if one cannot control his sentiment of love,--that is, if he has quite lost his head by falling in love,--he certainly cannot interest people very much in writing about it. His own emotions naturally overcome him when he begins to write about them. This is more or less true of all other emotions, but it is especially true of love, since most stories are about love, and love is the grand passion. It is certain that while one is subject to a sentiment he cannot write successfully about it. Of course this is different from loving consciously and restrainedly, as a mother loves her child. But even in this case, while a particular mother is loving a particular child, she is very likely to say a good many foolish things about the child and her love for him. When the child has grown up and twenty years have past, she can perhaps look back and write reasonably about the child and her love for him.

In general the young person, looking on life as a great mystery, not knowing what it holds for him or what it may not hold, is not competent to deal with the general problems of life in fiction until he has fought the fight out and gained his balance. Personal equilibrium is absolutely necessary to the

successful writing of fiction. Being swayed in this direction or that direction by one's emotions is akin to insanity. If one feels too intensely in one direction, or thinks too hard about one subject, he will go insane on that side of his brain, that is, he will lose all control of himself and all possibility of getting his mental balance again. One may indeed feel very intensely in one direction, and think very hard about one subject, yet be able to recover himself. While he has the power of pulling himself back, the physicians do not say he is insane. But while he allows himself to be under such a strain he cannot have the balance that is necessary for short story writing, to say the least, and he must recover himself completely before he can write successfully.

Of course one may be unbalanced in one direction and not in another, though when a man lacks perfect sanity in one direction you are likely to suspect him in all others, and disease in one part certainly saps the strength of other parts. But one may have the vice of excessive drinking, for instance, and at the same time be able to write wholesome love stories. Still, if one were going to follow that man's advice about love, one would wish he were not dissipated.

But if one does not have some balance of character there is little use in trying to write stories. The style will be strained and impossible, the scenes

will have glaring errors of observation, the whole work will appear like a picture in a stereopticon that is out of focus. All young persons are more or less unbalanced, since balance is something that must be acquired. They are like children learning to walk. By the very nature of the case they must be unsteady, and of course they cannot expect to run races until they are firm on their feet, physically and mentally. This unsteadiness of feeling about life is the greatest difficulty that young people have to contend with, and while it lasts it is impossible to judge their talent as writers. They should simply wait until they grow older, and not conclude at once that they really have no talent. But generally real talent persists through all these difficulties and this necessary waiting.

But if one does write, he can write successfully only about those simple things concerning which he does not especially care. If you care too much about any particular thing, that is quite certain to be the very worst thing you can write about. If you are merely interested in a character or a circumstance which amuses you without involving your personal feelings, that is the very thing to write about. We would earnestly advise all young writers to begin by being humorists. Everybody knows he cannot be funny if he tries very hard to be: it is equally true that one

cannot write good serious stories if he makes a great effort about it. Trying hard may teach you yourself a great deal, and indeed one learns little except by trying very hard indeed. But the results of the hard trying are not worth much as art. They are practice experiments which have to be thrown away.

If, however, you decide that you want to go through all the arduous work of learning, and are willing to wait for success with the public until you have mastered yourself, and are content with life as it was made, the following suggestions may help you to learn the art of interesting people with short stories. But all the rules and directions presuppose a healthy, sane mind, a certain amount of freedom from care and worry, and of course a more than average amount of brains and general education, though certainly no more than is afforded by a good high school or academy.

Note. In the following volume the word artistic as applied to short stories denotes a structure that produces the most telling effect on the reader. Often the word means elegant, refined, or technically flawless, as it is commonly used, but we prefer to view art as inherent effectiveness rather than something superadded.

PART FIRST.

The Different Kinds of Short Stories.

All short stories may be divided into five different classes. They are :
1. Tale, a story of adventure or incident of any sort, like many of Stevenson's, or preeminently Scott's or Dumas's; 2. Fable or allegory, a tale with a direct moral, like Hawthorne's short stories; 3. Study, in which there is a descriptive study of some type or character or characteristic, usually in a series, like Miss Wilkins's studies of New England people, or Joel Chandler Harris's studies of Southern people, or studies of actors, or studies of sentiment; 4. Dramatic Artifice, a story whose value depends on a clever dramatic situation, or a dramatic statement of an idea, like Stockton's "Lady or the Tiger," Richard Harding Davis's "The Other Woman", etc.; 5. Complete Drama, like Maupassant's short stories. The Drama combines all the elements found in the other kinds of stories into a single effective story. It tells a tale, it has a moral, though one usually more remote than the allegory, it has a study of character (for the dramatic cannot exist without a character more or less well developed to be dramatic), and it usually suggests some problem of life, or has some clever turn, or unexpected episode, or climax. Of course it is the hardest thing in the world to combine all these elements into one perfect whole, as Maupassant does, but the mere combination

itself has powers and produces effects which would have been utterly impossible to the various elements uncombined. The combination produces a new quality, which belongs wholly to itself. So this fifth sort of story is much more than the mere sweeping into one bundle of all the other kinds.

In practical study we should begin with the Tale, because to be able to tell a plain, straightforward story well is the beginning of the very highest art, and the narrative style is verbally at the bottom of all story-telling. The Fable is less important practically, because the moral of a story usually takes care of itself. From the Study you learn the descriptive style, next to the narrative style the most important to the story-teller. The Dramatic Artifice may be left out of view until the end of one's study, because it can never be effective until one has mastered narrative and description, and then to those who have the dramatic instinct it comes naturally. Such cannot help working toward a climax of some sort, and others will content themselves with the less ambitious tale or study.

We shall always work from the point of view of the drama, however, for it is the combination of elements toward which we should strive, it is the perfect goal.

II.

General Outline of the Method of Writing Short Stories.

Most short stories belong in varying degree to each one of the five classes we have mentioned. If narrative predominates it is a tale chiefly, though all the other elements of moral, character study, etc., may be present; if description predominates you call your story a study. The character of the subject in hand must determine these points. In discussing the typical short story, however, we will take the balanced whole as illustrated by Maupassant's stories in "The Odd Number", and from this type each writer can make such modifications as his own subject demands.

The course of procedure in setting about the writing of a short story may be as follows:

1. First, one must have a striking idea, situation, or trait of character, and only one. Few people can sit down and evolve a situation out of their heads. They must hit on it accidentally in some way, and it must be very simple or it will not be completely developed in a short story. The length of a story should be the same as the bigness of the idea, no bigger and no smaller, and to make a story longer or shorter than just as long as the idea is to spoil the story.

2. Having an idea, our young author sits down to write his story, and he is very likely to fix his attention on some general idea in space. But that is fatal.

He must have something definite to look at. Observe Maupassant in "The Necklace." He begins, "She was one of those pretty and charming girls who are sometimes, as if by a mistake of destiny, born in a family of clerks." Now this story is only 1800 words long, but Maupassant uses up about 300 at once in describing this woman. He tells how she dressed, what sort of things she had in the house, what she wished she had, what sort of man her husband was, what they had for dinner, her dreams and hopes. You feel quite well acquainted with the woman, as if she were your next door neighbor. And all the rest of the story is about this woman, what happened to her, how she was delighted and disappointed, etc. Her husband is hardly mentioned after the first. It is a story about this woman who has interested you, and everything is left out but her experience.

3. Having a right start, it is not difficult to go straight ahead to the end successfully, in a simple and natural manner. But still it is often puzzling to know what to select and what to reject of the many things that may present themselves to the mind. The invariable rule should be, Put in nothing that has not a bearing on the catastrophe of the story, and omit nothing that has. It is a great temptation if one has a fine moral sentence, an apt phrase, or a terse anecdote or observation, to put it in just where it occurs to the mind.

But the artistic story writer will sacrifice absolutely everything of that sort to the immediate interest of the story. That is to him everything. But apparently trivial details that are in the thread of the story must be put in. In "The Necklace" Maupassant tells how the wife tore open the letter of invitation, how she looked when she read it, what she said and what her husband answered; then how she went to get the necklace, what her friend said and what she said. But you will notice that he sticks close to the woman of whom he is telling the story. Everything about her is of interest. Nothing else is.

4. The secret of giving strength to a story is in a clever use of contrasts. A story that has been true to the preceding injunctions will be a correct story, but it will probably be weak unless it has strong contrasts in it, and to make strong contrasts one must match one description against another in each detail. In "The Necklace" notice the skilful contrast in the latter part of the story of what Madame Loisel actually did with what in the first part of the story she wanted to do. She wanted luxuries, servants, a fine house; but they dismissed the servant they had, rented a garret under the roof, etc. Each fact in the last part is match with a corresponding dream in the first part. Then at the very end of the story, her

friend, who is rich and still remains young with smooth, white hands, is brought face to face with madame who has grown coarse and rough? This constant and skilful use of contrast and cross-contrast makes the real strength of Maupassant.

5. But everything should tend to the bringing out of a single idea or particular thought of some kind, without which the story is valueless. The reader expects some pertinent conclusion, and if he does not find it he says the story is a failure, and when he has gotten the essential idea he does not care to read farther. He may read on to the end just out of curiosity to see if anything more does happen. But if there is nothing more he is disappointed. In the story of "The Necklace" Maupassant does not hint at his real idea until the very end, and when he has said the supposed diamond necklace is paste he stops short. The reader says to himself irresistibly, "Oh, the irony of fate!" and he is ten times more pleased than if Maupassant had said it himself, though no one could doubt he was thinking it all the time he was writing the story.

III.

Material for Short Stories.

An idea on which to base a good story must be original in some way, convey some new notion, or give a fresh impression. The struggle of humanity is to get out of itself, either for relief, or in the struggle to be better or to know more. In order to write a good short story, then, it is necessary for one to understand his audience well, to be informed of what the reader knows and what he does not know, and what he wants to know; for what is old and commonplace to you may be fresh to another, and likewise (do not forget) what is new and fresh to you may be perfectly familiar to many another. Most writers do not understand their audience very well, though they have stumbled on something that happens to prove interesting. If they stick to that one line they are read: if they try some other they often fail because they do not really understand the conditions of success. They have had mere luck, not conscious art.

To get a new idea one must either go beyond the bounds of his everyday life (as if a New Yorker went to Paris), or he must make discoveries underneath the surface. The world under his feet (and above his head for that matter) is as little known, usually very much less known, than the world in the next town. There may be some curious things over in the next town. But anybody who will go

over and see it can describe it, and the teller of stories that are simply curious must be more or less ephemeral. But if one happens on a good stray idea he certainly should make the most of it.

The ideas that one finds under his feet, do not usually come by mere luck: they are the result of skill and long study, and if a man does get at them he proves himself so much the brighter than his fellows.

If one wishes to write about sentiment or the secrets of life, that is, stories of human interest, he will find that the most effective ideas for a story are such as determine the entire course of some human life. An idea is good or bad in proportion as it is instrumental in determining a man's happiness or unhappiness. Such ideas are at the basis of each story in "The Odd Number". The incident that Maupassant narrates is the one great determining incident in the life of his principal character, and when that has been told there is absolutely nothing more of interest to say about that person. For instance, in the first story we have the fact that Suzanne ran away for love and was happy. There is absolutely nothing in her life that is worth telling in a story. This was her whole life. Yet it was something we ourselves do not sufficiently understand to risk doing as Suzanne did. We want to know just why she did it, and what the

result was, to make up our minds whether we would act as she did under similar circumstances.

In the second story we have a curious effect of cowardice. The act of the Coward was astonishing and we wonder if we would have been so affected. At the same time it absolutely determined the life of that man. It describes the supreme moment of his existence.

In the ideas of all the stories in this volume several things are to be noticed: Each idea throws some faint light on our knowledge of the action of the heart, or on the mystery of human life; each idea is astonishing or unexpected in itself, that is, it is new; nevertheless, though we are astonished at the idea, we see how natural it is the moment we comprehend it, and that makes it all the more astonishing; each story is an account of the supreme moment in some life, and our interest in that life not only begins but ends with the story. This fact makes the story seem perfectly complete, and in no other way can a story be felt to be complete.

There are other ideas used in stories,-an episode, an incident,--but these really belong to the category of stray, odd, or curious notions which one stumbles on by accident and which one may never meet again.

The most effective idea for a story, then, is one which absolutely determines

the destiny of some human being, and the more unexpectedly and abruptly and entirely it turns the life current about, the more effective will it appear. Maupassant's stories are, as we have said, all of this sort.

One reads a story of Maupassant's and it seems very simple. One thinks he can easily do the same thing. But the fact is that to tell effectively a story like one of Maupassant's, the writer must understand the life he writes about to the very roots. He must have a deep and vivid knowledge of the principles of psychology, of the actions and reactions of human feeling,--in short, he must know practically all there is to know about the life in which the incident occurs. The incident means nothing except as it affects a life, and an essential part of the story is a complete and thorough knowledge of the life.

Human life is so wide one man can know but one variety of it well. His natural bent of mind will determine what variety. Maupassant's characters in these stories (the best work he did) are very simple folk, there are few details in their lives at best, and they did only one thing of importance, namely the one thing he tells about. His stories are short because his characters are simple. The more complicated the character the more space it will take to elaborate it, that is, to name all the details it involves. Maupassant's characters, it may

be observed, staid in one place and had few relations to the outside world. The characters that one can write about successfully are usually with mental habits like one's own, though outwardly entirely different: for instance, if one's own plans and thoughts are on a large scale and far reaching, one's characters will be of the same order, and the delineation of them will require an amount of space proportioned to their reach.

The subject of literature is, however, almost solely the emotional side of life, and legitimate art does not admit controversial theology or science, except such ideas as may be assumed to be already accepted by the general reader. Accepted and conventional theories may be introduced with impunity. But when a man takes up a story he is most likely to want to know something about the emotional side of life, for it is emotions which determine the actions of men for the most part, now as in all time past. Anything that will throw light on the emotional side of life or play upon the emotions in any way, is a fit subject for literature, especially stories.

IV.

The Central Idea.

Short stories are like pearls: at the very centre of a pearl is a grain of sand about which the pearl material gathered. At the very centre of every short story is some passing idea such as almost any one might pick up. It is hard and practical, and alone is not worth very much, though sometimes it is a grain of gold instead of a grain of sand. It is the first thing the writer thinks of, however. He says, "I have an idea for a story." About that idea he develops his pearl of a story.

As example is better than any discussion, we will give in this chapter what seems to us the first ideas on which Maupassant probably based his stories in "The Odd Number", that is, what he had in his mind when he first said to himself, "I have an idea for a story."

1. Happiness. In another book of his he tells of a little incident which happened to himself from which he made this story. He was travelling in the Mediterranean for pleasure, and on one of the island he stumbled on an old couple such as he describes, who told him something of their history, which more or less resembles what he has given in the present story. The idea that came to his mind was this: What a splendid proof it would be of the power of love to make one happy if it could be shown that love has made this

old woman happy amid such surroundings. If she is happy here, love is the only thing that could have made her happy. The original idea was the thought of this clever way of proving the power of love.

2. A Coward. It would be impossible to say what incident suggested this story to the author as a matter of fact, but no doubt he saw a paragraph in a newspaper describing a man who committed suicide under such circumstances as to suggest that fear of death led him to the act. Most of us believe that suicide is essentially a cowardly act, but in no other way could this be illustrated so strikingly as by this story of a man who in his cowardly fear of death took his own life.

3. The Wolf. The interesting thing in the story is the sudden change of feeling in Francois from fear to rage. In some accidental way it was doubtless suggested to Maupassant that the human mind vibrates fearfully from horror and consternation and timidity to the opposite extreme. The incident of the wolf was probably a true story, which when linked with this idea became a pearl. The incident without this thought would not have served, however.

4. The Necklace. The author doubtless heard some story, whether the one he tells or another, in which a woman made a prodigious sacrifice for something which turned out far less valuable than she had imagined. No doubt the incident was

really that of a poor woman losing a supposed diamond necklace which in the end turns out paste, but it might also have been something else for which he substituted the diamond necklace as being more striking. This suggested to his mind the irony of fate, how we labor for that which is a delusion. The addition of this general idea to the incident of the necklace made the crude story begin to be a pearl.

5. The Piece of String. The central idea of this is the notion of a bad man being made to pay the penalty for a fault he might have committed but actually did not. Probably the original suggestion or the grain of sand was an incident of a man's picking up a piece of string and others supposing he picked up something valuable. That was little or nothing in itself, but it began to be a pearl when Maupassant thought of using it to illustrate the additional idea that the slightest thing may crystalize the current opinion about a man's character when in fighting against a small injustice he exhibits all his real weakness.

6. La Mere Sauvage. This story is more the study of a character than a drama, though the character is indeed dramatic in itself. The original idea was doubtless some description of such a woman. The preceding stories have started from an indident or a bit of human philosophy. This story probably started with a conception of the terrible character of the

Mere Sauvage, and the drama was invented afterward to illustrate the character, or more likely such events really occurred in connection with the character. The events may have come from one source, however, and the character from another, perhaps out of the author's own mind.

7. Moonlight. The original idea of this story was doubtless the notion, suggested vaguely in some way, that moonlight could really influence a man's character. From this the author began to consider how it could produce such an influence, and the most natural thing was to suppose it softened the character and made it susceptible to love. It is not for a moment to be supposed that there was any actual incident at the bottom of this.

8. The Confession. At the bottom of this story, too, there was probably no real incident. The author perhaps found some case of jealousy in a child. It struck him as strange that a child could be moved so deeply by jealousy as to do anything very bad or to have its life permanently influenced. As he thought, he took the extreme case of murder; then to make it worse he added concealment, and made the whole dramatic by the death-bed confession.

9. On the Journey. In the opening of this story the author gives a little extra setting in which he says, "We began to talk of that mysterious assassin"

That is probably the idea his mind began to work on, the accounts he had read in the newspapers of strange criminals in railway trains. In order to make the case worse he put a woman alone with the man. Then he began to work out what would happen, always remembering that everybody would expect some dreadful catastrophe, and whatever he made the two do it must not be commonplace. He took the thing fartherest from the natural expectation and made them fall in love. It is to be supposed that the whole development of this story was imaginary.

10. The Beggar. The theme of this story is the blindness of humanity to the suffering which transpires under its very eyes and which it would be only too glad to relieve if it could understand it. The story ends, "and they found him dead. . . What a surprise!" From this general thought the author probably proceeded to develop the character of the beggar, on which he keeps his eye as he writes.

11. A Ghost. This ghost story is like all others of its kind in that there is an apparition in a haunted house, and in that the reader imagines some unrevealed crime back of it all. The idea of combing hair is perhaps unique. The author doubtless heard a ghost story in which this happened, and he fancied that was sufficient to make the excuse for a new ghost story. He ad-

mits somewhere, however, that he does not succeed very well with ghost stories as a rule, and this is about the only good one he ever wrote. Ghost stories are all too much alike to enable him to give individuality to more than one, which he gave in this case by his style and treatment.

12. Little Soldier. Sometimes a clever contrast, naive characters, or a simple style of telling is good excuse for retelling an old story. The story of two young men falling in love with one girl, without either suspecting the other until one makes love to the girl, is common enough. Maupassant knew that, but it occurred to him that he could make a sort of new study of a soldier, for his "little soldiers" are not the kind we commonly think of. He also saw that extreme simplifying of what is usually a complicated matter would have its own interest. So he told the old story in his own way. "Little Soldier" (singular, for the story is about the little soldier who died) is a study essentially, a new study of an old situation, and in a small way also a study of a type character, the simple-hearted Breton soldier.

13. The Wreck. This is another study, for there is no drama in the broad sense of the word. It is the study of an atmosphere and a sentiment, working subtly. Probably the author

had heard an account of two people being thrown together on a wreck in the manner he describes. To this simple notion he added the possible sentiment, and made a delicate study of it. The delicate study of the sentiment is the really valuable thing in the story, though the dramatic situation was necessary, of course, simple though it is.

The peculiarity of the ideas on which Maupassant bases his short stories is their slightness in their original state as compared with the ample soul he gives and the richness of the dress. Unless the writer has a wealth of material in his own mind and heart, such simple ideas as Maupassant uses become flat and absurd. To take a very slight notion and build up a good story on it is the most difficult phase of the art. It is easier, and in its execution really simpler, to take an incident ready made that is strong and dramatic of itself and does not need so much addition. In a recent novel by Maxwell Grey, "The Last Sentence", (which is really only a short story in many pages), the situation of a judge having to condemn to death his own child is so powerful in itself that almost any one could write a good story about it. The beginner should always try to find such large situations, because it is a great deal easier to handle them than the

smaller ones. The last story in Vol. I of "Short Stories by American Authors" is almost a model for a clever idea. "An Operation in Money" is very cleverly told but it is an easy story to tell. Almost any one who thought of the possible power a bank cashier would have if he simply carried several hundred dollars away with him at night, and was willing to face the consequences coolly, could make a story out of it which would at least be readable, provided he did not plaster it with sentiment or bad writing. The essential notion in this story is that if a man could be cool enough to face the situation, and bear ten years in a prison, everything else that was done in that story would be easily possible. Perhaps not every one could easily conceive so audacious a man or so cool a deed. Any man, almost, would find it natural enough, and any woman who could n't would be pretty sure to have a nature sympathetic enough to work out such an idea as that in "Miss Eunice's Glove", by the same author, in Vol. VI. of the same series. The idea of the criminal getting the lady's glove and the fact of his possession of it frightening her is much slighter than the idea in "An Operation in Money", and its effectiveness depends more on the sympathetic way in which Miss Eunice is portrayed.

V.

The Soul of the Story.

In the preceding chapter we showed how a perfect short story was like a pearl, in which the pearl material is gathered around a grain of sand, that is, the incident on which the story is based. The grain of sand, or the actual incident in each case, is useless ~~in each case~~ until the moral idea or principle of life is added to it. In Happiness a realization of the power of love was added to the incident of the two old people who had run away and were happy. To the incident of the suicice in 'The Coward was added the thought that cowardice concerning death itself actually led to it. In The Necklace the incident illustrates the general principles of the irony of fate. And so if we examine each one of the analyses made in the preceding chapter we shall find that there was a principle of life, a moral, or a realization of a general idea which was the real reason for the existence of the story.

The second sort of story in our five different kinds was the fable, which is a story told expressly to illustrate a moral. Though ordinary dramatic short stories do not have a moral which shows itself, still under the surface in every story is something which corresponds to the moral and which we will call the soul of the story. The soul in any story is that element which makes the

story significant for life, which makes it have a bearing on the problems of our existence, and which makes the story a creation with a strength for playing its own individual part in the world, like a human being.

Tales of adventure may be clever and interesting (we mean tales of mere incident, if such exist), and if one chooses to write so simply he has a good right to. But a story is very likely to live or die in proportion to the size of its soul, that is, in proportion as it is in some way significant for life. It is the soul of the story which makes it sink into the reader's mind and live there, and which makes him go back to the story and read it a second or a third time. He has caught a breath of the infinite, or a glimpse of the meaning of existence which he did not have so clearly before, and it gives him life.

If we should go over each one of the tales in "The Odd Number" we should discover that every one without a single exception has a meaning of its own in regard to life. The Piece of String contains a curious incident. It is odd that so simple a thing as a piece of string should get a man into such trouble, such dire trouble. But that is not all: How did it get him into trouble? That is of much more vital concern. We see how clearly the author has brought out the thought that the incident of the string was only the excuse of fate for showing

the man's real character. He resented the implication against his character just because he knew his weakness in that direction and realized that he might have been guilty though as a matter of fact he was not, and this made him determined to clear himself. He was really condemned to death by his own consciousness of evil though he tried to believe it was an unjust persecution, and such a principle as that has vast significance for us who must live lives in the world.

La Mere Sauvage illustrates the power of certain passions, and Moonlight the susceptibility of the hardest heart to the influences which soften us, provided such influences are brought to bear at just the right point. The Confession throws a bright light on the tendency of the soul to recoil on itself under the influence of an evil consciousness, and The Beggar shows us how liable we are to intellectual blindness.

But the young writer will ask, How is this to be managed? What is the rule for manufacturing the soul of a story, and putting it within the heart of the incident? Alas, there is no rule, for just here we touch on the vast unknown which separates those who have stories to tell from those who have not or who are not endowed with this sort of genius. But the soul of the story is born of much thinking about life and its principles, its inner meaning, its significance,

whether intellectual, moral, or sentient.

If one does not know something worth knowing about life, something of value or suggestiveness, something new and meaningful, he has no material out of which to create a soul. In order to create soul one must have the soul material within him to begin with.

But if one is deeply and vitally interested in life, he will not care to attempt a story which does not have some meaning. His clever incident, his power of character-drawing, his beautiful style will all be held subservient to the soul, the significance, and they will all be used to clothe and express the soul, which is a conviction, a feeling, an inward realization, and not a theory or creed or bit of clever information about life. The soul is drawn out of the deep wells of our being, and in the written story it is the element which gives immortality.

VI.

Character Study.

The third kind of short story is the Study, which may be a study of almost anything, but we may consider it the study of character. This is then the third element to be considered in the construction of a perfect story. The tale and the fable tell about people and what they do, but a great many different kinds of people might do the things that are described. Indeed, if the characters were wooden sticks they might go through all the motions just the same as if they were highly characteristic individual human beings. But the finer the point of the story, the more it has a soul rather than an obtrusive moral, the more individual must be the study of character. ~~This is then the third element to be considered in the construction of a per~~. The truth is, it is difficult to imagine a story absolutely without character study in any form, but many stories have a merely conventional character study. In a story having a really original character study the relation of the character to the soul of the story is usually vital, that is, there could be no soul if there were not a living character to which the soul could be attached in some way, though the soul of the story is a very different thing from the soul of the chief character.

The comparison of the various elements

in every perfect story to the different sorts of short stories ends here. The original idea or incident, the soul or moral, and the study of character cover the essential elements of the story. Each element is important and indispensable in some form, in greater or less degree. But perhaps most depends on the character study. We shall hereafter view everything from that point.

Each one of Maupassant's stories gives a complete idea of some one character. From our present point of view, each one of his stories is the history of a life drama. The catastrophe turns the course of the life about. For instance, Happiness is a study of Suzanne. She was of good family, the Colonel's daughter, and she ran away with a common soldier and lived meanly ever after in Corsica. Her whole life was changed. The story has meaning because her love made her happy, but from the point of view of the character the woman was the story. In A Coward we have one man's life and soul history. Maupassant in each case tells the great and vital event in each life, and lets all other details go. So long as a life runs in its natural channels it is not interesting. You cannot know how much power is concealed in it. Nobody knows with what force a cannon ball is moving until it meets some obstacle. Then there is a crash, and the violence of the crash measures the force of the cannon ball.

Nobody knows how much latent power is contained in a human life until that life runs up against an obstacle and its course is completely changed or all its force destroyed. The life may be surprisingly weak or surprisingly strong. In either case it becomes a striking example, and the crash gives us a chance to study its moving principles. When the crash comes the whole life is laid open and we see its secret springs. That is what interests us in our general study of human nature.

Every perfect story which describes a human drama must have one central character, to which all others are subservient. There are stories of a family, or of a city, or of a nation, in which the family or city or nation is treated as an individual human being, and to all intents and purposes is a unit. But we may think of the central figure in every story ~~case~~ as being a single person, as is usually the case. It is never a group of persons not welded together into a body in some way, and when a group is so welded together, you take the group for the purposes of the story as a body and not as a cluster of individuals.

This statement that there can be but one character in a story may need illustration, for it is not patent at the outset. For instance, in a love story there are two lovers. How is the lovestory more the story of one lover than the other? the reader may ask. The reply

is that in every such case one such personality is much more interesting than the other in the mind of the author, and he always selects this one personality to tell the story about. The catastrophe turns the life current of this particular one aside, while the life current of the other goes on undisturbed. In Happiness there are two characters, but the life of the common soldier went on after marriage much as it did before. The whole interest attaches to the life course of Suzanne, who was of high family and for love's sake took wretchedness. In The Necklace there are two characters, also, the husband and the wife. The story is all about the wife, for the accident happened to her. There may also be a story about the husband, how he felt, how his life was turned about, but Maupassant found the story of the woman so much more interesting that he told that and not the story of the man. In Moonlight there are the Abbe and the lovers. In the facts there is a story about each, but Maupassant chose to tell the story of the Abbe, leaving the story of the lovers technically undeveloped. In The Confession the story of the younger sister is told in detail while the story of the elder is only outlined, because the life history of the elder was not so interesting in its development. In On The Journey there is more nearly a

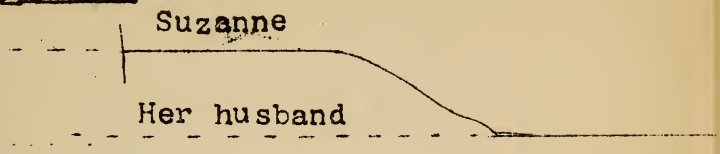
story of two people equally, but after all it is the life of the woman that is described rather than that of the man. In Little Soldier the very title indicates that the story is of the little soldier who loved and did not tell his love and died. There is a story about the milk-maid, but it is only hinted at.

The fact is, each life on this globe of ours stands alone. Very, very seldom are two histories completely blended, and in a short story everything must be viewed from the standpoint of but one life. We may imagine a novel developing several lives completely. In a novel a whole world is created, which is complete in itself. In a short story only one incident and one life history are considered. Lines of possibility run out in every direction. It is often a temptation to follow some of them out. But when the writer turns aside from the one line he has chosen to start with, the story is spoiled.

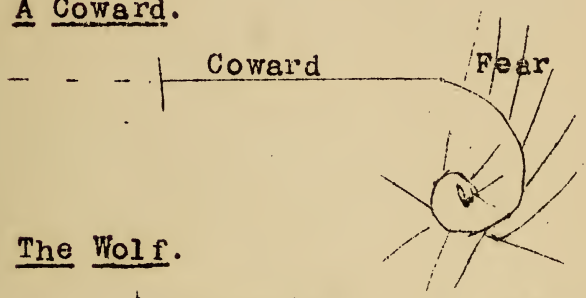
To assist the reader's thought in understanding the meaning of life currents in a story, and how the main current is distinguished from the minor, we introduce at this point some mathematical diagrams borrowed from physics which are used to illustrate the action and reaction of forces. It is a law that when two moving bodies meet each is turned out of its course by the other in proportion to its size and velocity. In the accompanying diagrams each line repre-

DIAGRAMS FOR PAGE 47.

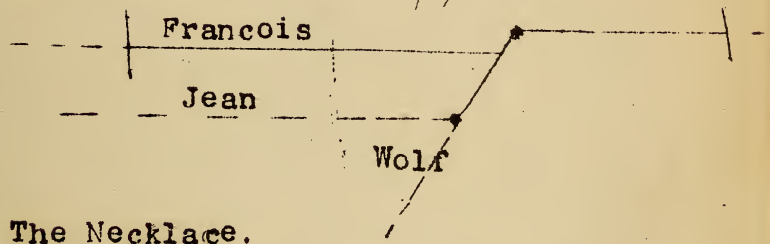
1. Happiness.



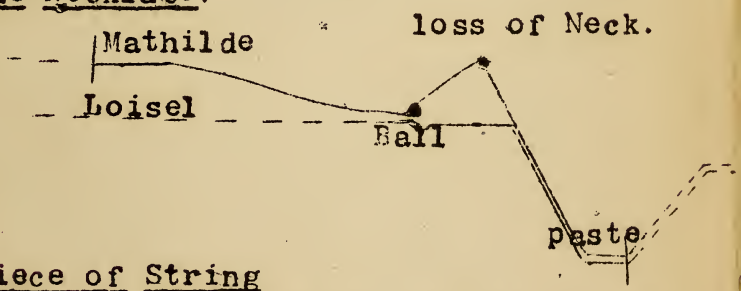
2. A Coward.



3. The Wolf.



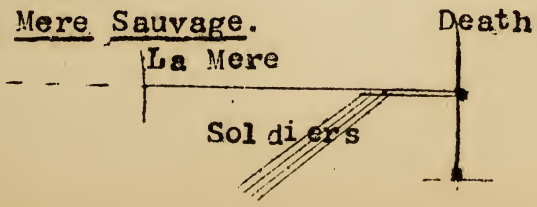
4. The Necklace.



5. Piece of String

Same as 2, substituting criticism for fear.

6. La Mere Sauvage.



sents the course of a life. The story that is actually told begins with the first cross mark and ends with the second. The story's development follows the line of the main character from a point sufficiently before the catastrophe to a point sufficiently after, and the other lines come in as an influence on the main character.

In Happiness we have Suzanne's life going along evenly with that of the common soldier, but on a higher level. Gradually he draws her life course down to his, and finally, when they marry, her life is suddenly blended with his and the two go on together as one to the end. The story is very simple.

In the second, A Coward, the life course of the coward is pressed upon by continuous fear until he is turned in on himself and ends in a knot, that is, he commits suicide.

In The Wolf the lives of the two brothers go along parallel for a time. Then the wolf comes up from below and kills Jean. The pair are carried up against the life of Francois, the wolf is killed, and the life of Francois is carried off on a higher level. The event gives him a fine passion, which elevates his character, and his life ends in a parallel course but higher up.

In The Necklace we have a slightly more complicated state of things. Mme. Loisel's life started on a higher plane

than her husband's but for a time comes down very nearly to his. Then the two come against a lifeless obstacle, the ball. This slightly depresses the husband for a time, but elevates the wife. Her line goes up until the discovery of the loss of the supposed diamond necklace, when it goes down suddenly, and carries with it the line of her husband. They keep on going down until they have paid the loss and finally discover that it was paste instead of diamond. What happened after that we are not told, but we may imagine their rising to their former level, but probably not so high after ten years of depressing work, and going on smoothly to the end. That is only supposition, however, and is indicated by dotted lines.

In A Piece of String we have another case of a life thrown in on itself by exterior force, criticism, until it gets wound in so completely that it ends itself.

In La Mere Sauvage we have La Mere going along on a common level for a time, then she is joined by the four German soldiers who for a time fall into her way of living. The sudden news of the death of her son is represented by a line coming from above which causes her line to turn sharply across the lines of the soldiers, that is kill them, and immediately after her line ends abruptly, having run into the earth, we may suppose.

VII.

What Makes a Story Worth Telling.

The editor of one of the large magazines recently remarked to the writer of this that the difficulty with the great mass of the stories sent him was not in lack of power to tell but in the lack of something worth telling. The stories were nearly all well written commonplaces. The present time is peculiarly fitted to call out commonplace stories that are well written rather than strong stories that are poorly written, as was the case forty years ago. Many of the stories actually printed in the magazines are so commonplace they are not worth telling, and are not materially better than hundreds that are rejected. They are usually written by persons who have before written stories with valuable ideas in them, stories well worth telling, and the editor in accepting the commonplace story by the same author assumes that if the author wrote one or more good stories, stories worth telling, the present story must in some way be worth telling, and he admits it to the pages of his magazine without actually judging it as he judges all the stories of a beginner. But that he admits the commonplace stories of a writer of reputation is certainly no reason why he should admit the commonplace stories of a beginner, as many beginners seem to think. They say, "My story was just as good as that one: why did n't he accept

mine as well as that one?" To be sure, your story may have been just as good as that one by a well known writer, and still there may have been no reason why your story or his should ever have been written, and if his worthless story had the misfortune to be printed, it is no reason why you should not regard it as good fortune that your worthless story was not printed. We know it is rather a difficult philosophy to regard it as a piece of good fortune when you fail to get into print, but that is often the truth.

It is assumed that any one who presumes to learn the art of short story writing will have had a good English education, will be able to write grammatically, to punctuate, and to express himself with considerable freedom and fluency. If also he has mastered the structure of the short story as outlined in the foregoing pages, he will then be able to write a story sufficiently well to make it acceptable as far as the form is concerned. In the present chapter we wish to consider what is necessary as to matter to make the story worth the telling.

In the first place, a story teller must be in touch with the thought and feeling of the public at any given time. What was a good story fifty years ago is not likely to be a good story now. It may have lasting elements, but those would be due to genius, a thing we are

not now considering especially. Today there are a certain list of topics which a large number of people are thinking about, concerning which they wish information. On the side of these subjects they are especially susceptible. A story may be told merely to amuse and not to give information; still the principle holds good, for except in the direction that they are vitally interested, people are not sufficiently susceptible even to appreciate a good joke.

To start with, then, the young writer must be familiar with the topics of life that are uppermost in the public mind; still more, he must be in touch with the mood that is predominant. When the public is very serious, as it is when it has been stirred up about some great question of public policy, it wants a more or less serious story, and frivolity repels. On the other hand, when a reaction from its serious mood has come, a frivolous story pleases it most and a serious one is an abomination. At present the public is much in a medium state, inclined to become more and more serious, if we may be pardoned a sweeping and personal judgment. But each writer must realize all these things for himself. Stories of provincial life, studies of different parts of the country, have been much in fashion, but the liking for them seems just now on the wane. The keen observer will see the signs of the times

and not insist on writing provincial stories when cosmopolitan ones are about to come chiefly into demand.

In a book of this nature we cannot undertake to put the young writer into touch with the public as it actually is. He must do that for himself. But if he would work effectively he must gain this touch to some extent, at least. If what he writes is worth anything, it must help the public think out the problems which are actually before it. Humorous light on the problem is just as valuable as any other, and back of amusement we nearly always find some serious substance. So in whatever light you regard story writing, the point of view from which success comes is the serious one of helping the public to think out some problem in which it is interested, or at least to throw light, whether red, green, or white, on the topics that are uppermost.

Lest the reader may take the statement of the case too seriously, let us give an illustration of a general kind. The public are always interested in love in some phase or other. But a love story which tells of a courtship after the old-fashioned, conventional, stiff manner, would be very dull indeed as compared with an artistic account of a modern affair of the heart.

What people like best is to know of something that falls in naturally with their own lives, and consciously or

unconsciously helps them in a practical way to live. Unless it really touches their interests it counts for little. Simply to tell about something you know, however well you do it, is worth little unless your reader is also interested in it. If he knows all you have to tell him before he begins your story, he naturally finds it a bore. At the same time if he does not know anything about it, he is likely not to care to know anything. What he wants is something that just fits his own case, or falls in with something he has been thinking about. If he has been thinking about old coins or dead men's bones, these subjects may form the basis of a story that will interest him, just as a story about a practical love affair will interest him if he happens to have a love-affair on hand himself.

The writer of a story does not write for the editor, or for his own amusement (if he hopes to get into print), but to amuse or interest some possible reader. In ordinary social intercourse, if you expect to interest your friends you do not talk about yourself or the things you are interested in, so much as the things your friends are interested in. If you know anything new about anything a friend is particularly interested in, you feel sure that telling him what you know will interest or amuse him. In a much broader way the same is true of the

public and the writer. If the writer wishes to interest the public (which is the meaning of success in writing), he writes about the things the public are interested in, and not only this but he tells something fresh or suggestive about these topics, or he holds his peace. If any writer can say any practical thing, in a story or out of it, that any considerable number of persons would be interested to know, he can safely write, and feel more or less sure that he will get into print. If he merely writes for the sake of writing he does not deserve to get into print.

There are some persons who write largely for the public who have nothing whatever to say, but who have a clever way of saying nothing. A story may be beautiful for its style, which however means simply that there is something in the fresh way of saying the old thing which actually throws a glimmer of light on it. Also a story that has merely a situation which strikes the reader as new, different from any he has met before, may be worth printing. As a general thing the stories currently printed have only <u>one</u> point of real value, but a story to be worth anything must be out of the ordinary in at least one particular. A unique style, one that either stimulates, rasps, or charms may be the one thing. A new situation may be the one thing. A new character may

be the one thing. A little bit of original philosophy of life may be the one thing. But the author must know just what that one thing is and bend all his energies to making it tell. To write a story and hope it may have one good point is not enough. The chances are a million to one against it. The writer must know enough of the reader to know what will interest or help or amuse him. This knowledge of the public and what it wants is the one great secret of successful writing. It is a fine and delicate knowledge, and has to be gained chiefly by experience and experiment. Publishers themselves understand it very little, for they can seldom tell how a new book will sell. Magazine editors know the kind of thing that has proved successful so far in their magazines, and confine themselves pretty closely to what they know, not venturing very much on new things. The young writer who is to be successful must discover something new and useful by experimenting himself, and when he has found it he will keep pretty close to his original line if he wishes to keep on succeeding. It is much like a miner striking a vein of valuable ore, whether gold, silver, or lead. He does not make any money until he has found his vein of ore, and then he knows he will not make much more unless he sticks to that vein till it is exhausted. Of course every vein gives out in time, in story

writing as in mining. Then the author will have to give up writing or find a new vein, but he should not abandon his old vein until it is worked to the end.

That a writer cannot hope to work more than one vein with very great success at a time is clearly seen by referring to the successful writers of the past. Scott wrote historical romances; Dickens studies of low life, Trollope stories of high life, Gilbert Parker writes of the great Northwest, Mary Wilkins of New England, Cable of Louisiana, and so with all the rest of those who have made a place for themselves.

It has been our observation that men most often take a good theme which they treat badly, and women a poor theme which they treat well. We do not know exactly how the experiment would work in practice, but it has always seemed a plausible plan to suppose that a man and a woman, if they sympathized with each other, could write a story together very much better than either could write alone. In such collaboration the man should make the plot, furnish the general philosophy of life, and work out the practical details of construction. In this sphere he should have full rein. Then the woman should write out the story in her own way, since she is almost invariably superior in taste, delicacy, and truth of expression.

This is not altogether an original

notion, for Edmund Gosse (we believe it is he) has remarked in a paper on Collaboration which was printed sometime since in the New Review, that the very best collaborator a man can have in writing anything, and fiction above all, is an intelligent, sympathetic woman, only Mr. Gosse says she should have no literary ambitions of her own. It is well known that several successful authors are almost absolutely dependent on their wives for revision of their novels as to taste, delicacy, and truthfulness to the gentler sentiments. The great difficulty is to find a companion who is both intelligent and sympathetic, for intelligence too often goes its own way, and sympathy without intelligence is useless.

However this may be, it still remains that the great bulk of the unpublished work of women is excessively commonplace in subject, and the great bulk of the unpublished work of men is crude in expression. Women are, nevertheless, well adapted to writing short stories, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that this will some day be considered a peculiarly feminine art. The greater number of persons to whom this book will go are therefore likely to be women, and though the book as a whole is addressed to men and women alike, we may be pardoned a paragraph at this point directly addressed to women. The one essential criticism that can be passed on the greater part of the un-

successful attempts of women is that their work is hopelessly commonplace. There are women who have just the opposite fault, but they are few. That commonplaceness is a general fault of the sex we do not assert, though the fact that women doubtless have a narrower range than their brothers, accounts for a part of it. The truth is, a certain school of writers which has held the upper hand in American literature for some time past, has drilled it into the minds of all would-be writers that nothing is too trivial or commonplace to be made the subject of a story. ~~The small [illegible] of life have been [illegible] the trivial. The young writer has been made to feel that he [illegible] the [illegible].~~ There is some truth in this point of view, for if one can extract a new idea from a most trivial and commonplace incident, as Maupassant often does, he may be considered a genius. But there are very few indeed who are geniuses, and those who are not geniuses try to extract something out of the small and trivial and succeed in getting only the commonplace and trite. You should write of the slight and trivial by all means if you can say something fresh and helpful and new about it. But if there is nothing valuable in the situation with which you start for your story, remember that you must put along with your trivial incident something strong, fresh, and useful out of

your own powerful hold on life. The grains of sand about which Maupassant forms his pearls are poor, slight things, but the wealth of thought and feeling and knowledge of life which he adds to his pitiful grain of sand in each case is simply luxuriant in abundance, and came from long, careful, painful observation of life and from personal experience of an unusual breadth. The young writer before presenting his work to the publisher should be very certain that he has something to say or give to the reader which the reader can enjoy or use, and he must understand just how the reader is going to enjoy or use it. Unless he can see this and understand it, he should not believe that he has any call to write short stories. Moreover, it is not enough to know that the story when told verbally has interested some one. It is infinitely easier to interest verbally than through writing, so unless the story when told has a sort of electric interest it is not worth writing. Some people, of course, cannot tell a story half as well as they can write it; but they can imagine the effect which would be produced if they could tell the story well in spoken words, and if when thus told they can see just how it would electrify the hearer with its interest, they may know it is a story worth writing. But unless a story will interest the hearer very unusually one may be pretty certain

it is not likely to interest the reader at all. Of course there is the possible interest excited by a written style; but a skilful style is acquired only by long, tedious practice, except in the very rarest instances, and one cannot fancy his style will count for anything until he has fully ten years of practical experience with writing that has actually been published. So after all there is no real exception from the general rule for the young writer, that he must have something new and fresh or useful to say to the reader.

I.

To Obtain a Good Command of Language

When a young writer asks a successful literary man how to obtain a good style, he is likely to receive the answer, "A man's style is like a leopard's hide, a part of him. Any dress of words that fits the thought you have is a good dress, or at least you cannot change it any more than the leopard can change his spots. All you can do toward writing well is to write naturally."

This answer is true enough, but it does not reply to the young writer's question. When he asks how to obtain a good style he means to ask how he can best gain a command of that instrument for reaching human minds and hearts called language. No man is born with this command any more than he is born with a command of the violin. Exquisite music on that instrument is produced only after lessons and practice, and the same is true of language. Some learn more easily than others, of course, in whatever they undertake, but nobody learns without spending time and patient labor to learn, whether violin playing or the use of words. "Style" in the sense of one's natural manner of doing anything, whether using words or playing the violin or walking, cannot be changed or cultivated. But "style" in the sense of using words well or ill, forcefully or weakly, with grace and beauty or awkwardly,

is a thing that must be learned if it is to be possessed at all. Any one not befogged with literary theories will acknowledge that.

In order to write effectively in any form, especially stories, a good command of language is necessary. One is endowed from childhood with a certain vocabulary, which may be called natural, and all the simpler structures and metaphores become familiar instinctively. Ordinarily one would not study the dictionary for new words unless, having attained a considerable success in writing he wished to perfect his powers of expression in the minutest details. But there are very few people who know how to manage the words they already know so as to produce effects with them, and this is just the knowledge they must acquire. To produce music on a piano requires first of all a piano, which is like one's natural vocabulary. You may have a good piano or a bad one, and if the piano is bad you cannot hope to produce very good music on it however well you play; but a skilled musician can get better music out of a bad piano than a poor musician can get out of the best instrument ever made. One may be dowered by Heaven or some other power with a piano or a vocabulary, but to use either effectively it is equally necessary to learn how.

The method we shall recommend is the only effective one known, and is borrowed

from the private instructions of the professor of rhetoric whose textbooks are now in most general use.

In general, the method is, Read good models of style. This is vague, however. There are a number of acknowledged masters of English prose. Some of them are De Quincey, Macaulay, Matthew Arnold, Daniel Webster, and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Perhaps a more notable example among American writers is Washington Irving. Perhaps the reader will ask, Why do you not mention some of the English novelists, Thackeray, Dickens, Scott, George Eliot? The fact is they sometimes fail in their verbal style, because they developed a practically new form of writing, namely modern fiction, and all their attention was turned to the construction of the novel rather than the effective use of words and phrases. Among novelists we know of no better model of style than Mr. Howells, for in verbal expression he doubtless far excels the greater novelists who preceded him. Hawthorne, also, seems never to have fallen into the errors of style which belong to Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, and their contemporaries. The English essayists, however, thought far more of their verbal style than of the form of construction they used, since the essay was a literary form fully developed before they began to write, and they are probably the most natural models one would select for his first study.

From Macaulay select a few of his most brilliant and powerful passages, such as the description of the Puritans in the essay on "Milton." Take one of these passages and read it over and over until you begin to see just how he builds his sentences, or rather until you feel it. It is not necessary to analyze and get principles which you must apply. The valuable thing is to become so imbued with Macaulay's personality as expressed in his style that you will insensibly write as he does when you come to put pen to paper. Knowing all about his antitheses, his paragraph structure, etc., theoretically will be of small value, but if you feel something of how it is done you can do it yourself more or less well. When you have become thus imbued sit down and try to write something, for instance describe your impression of his style. One pupil after a prolonged study of various passages wrote an essay on Macaulay as a model of style, in which very much of the strength of Macaulay was reproduced, yet without a trace of what might be called imitation. It would serve equally well if you wrote out your impression of the subject he has been discussing. Take that subject in connection with him which from the first chiefly interests you. If you are interested in him as a model of style, write about him in that capacity; if you are interested in the light he sheds upon any topic, discuss

with as much force of language as he uses some phase of the subject which especially attracts you.

Follow this with De Quincey's "English Mail Coach", Matthew Arnold's "Culture and Anarchy", especially "Sweetness and Light" (the first essay), Webster's oration in reply to Hayne, and Hawthorne's "Mosses from an Old Manse." In the case of Hawthorne it would doubtless be best in writing your essay to try to reproduce one of the stories as well as you can in your own language after becoming imbued with his method of story-telling, but be sure to select a simple narrative subject.

Irving's "Sketch Book" and Howells's "Venetian Life" might be studied also. The student could write about Irving's characters in a general way as Irving does about each in particular, while bits of "Venetian Life" might be crystalized practically as to its style in a paper trying to produce your impression of the scene in such language as Mr. Howells would have used.

These studies to be valuable should not be taken up promiscuously, but with a definite seriousness. If you start with Macaulay do not cease reading him strenuously and studiously until you feel master of him. Read one passage over and over until you feel it a part of your very self, until you almost feel that you could have written it as well

If one passage fails to give you this necessary mastery, try others, and still others, never leaving one, however, until it is mastered. When you feel that you have gotten all you can out of your master, write your essay. If it is a decided success, leave him and take up another. If it is a failure, go over the process again until you have accomplished something that you can feel assured of. Each one of the authors we have mentioned has a very different style from any other, and in a way each is representative of definite elements of a perfect style. From Macaulay you will get certain elements of strength, from De Quincey certain elements of subtlety, and from each of the others some other element of value. Your study cannot be said to be complete until you have gone over the whole list, which would require many months of work even from the brightest. But if you can give only a limited amount of time, take the ones you admire most and study them thoroughly.

When you are actually launched in literary work you will wish to make efforts to enlarge your vocabulary. Much can be done with this object in view, doing a little at a time during a considerable period, and the practical means are the following: Select passages from any of the writers mentioned, pro-

ferrably the essayists. Read over once for the idea, then once with an effort to remember the words, yet without trying actually to memorize them. Having given the passage two readings, close the book and reproduce the ideas in as nearly the same words and arrangement as possible. On comparison with the original you will probably find you have substituted some words of your own, from the study of which differences you will gain your chief advantage. Look up in the dictionary the word you have used and the word in the original for which you substituted it. Trace the derivation and essential differences of each. Detect the shades of meaning that may be conveyed by each and you will have added not this word alone but many others to your vocabulary.

II.

Narrative, Description, and Dialogue.

In fiction there are three different kinds of writing which must be blended with a fine skill, and this fact makes fiction so much the more difficult than any other sort of writing. History is largely narrative pure and simple, newspaper articles are description ~~largely~~, dramas are dialogue, but fiction must unite in a way peculiar to itself the niceties of all three.

The young writer in studying for command of language for short story writing will have to take each style separately and master it thoroughly before trying to combine the three in a work of fiction. The simplest is narrative, and consists chiefly in the ability to tell a simple story straight on to the end, just as in conversation Neighbor Gossip comes and tells a long story to her friend the Listener. The way in which to gain this skill is to practise writing out tales or stories just as nearly as possible as a child would do it if he had a sufficient vocabulary. Letter-writing, when one is away from home and wishes to tell his intimate friends all that has happened to him, is practice of just this sort, and the best practice.

Newspaper articles are more descriptive than any other sort of writing. You have a description of a new invention, of a great fire, of a prisoner at the bar of

justice. It is not quite so spontaneous as narrative. Children seldom describe, and the newspaper man finds difficulty in making what seems a very brief tale into a column article until he can weave description as readily as he breathes.

Dialogue in a story is by no means the same as the dialogue of a play: it ought rather to be a description of a conversation, and very, very seldom is it a full report of what is said on each side.

Description is used in its technical sense to designate the presentation of a scene without reference to events. Narative is a description of events as they have happened, and dialogue is a description of conversation. Fiction is essentially a descriptive art, and quite as much is it descriptive in dialogue as in any other part.

The best way to master dialogue as an element by itself is to study the novels of Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot. Dialogue has its full development only in the novel, and it is here and not in short stories that the student of short stories should study it. The important points to be noticed are that only characistic and significant speeches are reproduced. When the conversation gives only facts that should be known to the reader it is thrown into the indirect or narrative form, and frequently when the impression that a conversation makes is all that is important, this impression is

described in general terms instead of a report of the conversation itself.

So much for the three different modes of writing individually considered. The important and difficult point comes in the balanced combination of the three, not in the various parts of the story, but in each single paragraph. Henry James in his paper on "The Art of Fiction" says very truly that every descriptive passage is at the same time narrative, and every dialogue is in its essence also descriptive. The truth is, the writer of stories has a style of his own, which we may call the narrative-descriptive-dialogue style, which is a union in one and the same sentence of all three sorts of writing. In each sentence, to be sure, narrative or description or dialogue will predominate; but still the narrative is always present in the description and the description in the dialogue, as Mr. James says; and if you take a paragraph this fact will appear more clearly, and if you take three or four paragraphs, or a whole story, the fusion of all three styles in the same words is clearly apparent.

Let us imagine a story unembodied in words, for instance an adventure that has happened to the narrator but which he has never before told. He undertakes to give ~~an impression~~ a description of the natural impression which the story, including its events, scenes, and characters, has produced on his mind. In order

to describe this impression vividly the narrator must use all the means of language at his command. If it is scenery which he wishes to describe he uses what is technically called the descriptive style, if it is character which he wishes to present vividly, he will be very likely to use the dialogue style, and if it is events, scenes, and character all at the same time which must be presented, as is indeed almost always the case, he uses a combination of all these means in the combination style which we have described, and this peculiar style must be learned exclusively in writing stories. It is not employed in letter-writing to any extent, nor in newspaper work, nor in essay writing. It is a use of language peculiar to the art of fiction, and is the most difficult of all styles to acquire, because it is the most varied, the most flexible, and the most sympathetic. It is really a very complicated style, and is mastered only by reading the great novelists with attentive care, and by constant and long practice in story writing.

It is impossible to give fixed rules for the varying proportion of description, narration, or dialogue in any given passage. The writer must guide himself entirely by the impression in his own mind. He sees with his mind's eye a scene and events happening in it. As he describes this from point to point he

constantly asks himself, What method of using words will be most effective here? He keeps the impression always closely in mind. He does not wander from it to put in a descriptive passage or a clever bit of dialogue or a pleasing narrative: he follows out his description of the impression with faithful accuracy, thinking only of being true to his own conception, and constantly ransacking his whole knowledge of language to get the best expression, whatever it may be. Now it may be a little descriptive touch, now a sentence or two out of a conversation, now plain narration of events. Dialogue is the most expansive and tiring, and should frequently be relieved by the condensed narrative, which is simple and easy reading. Description should seldom be given in chunks, but rather in touches of a brief and delicate kind, and with the aim of being suggestive rather than full and detailed.

In conclusion let us advise the young writer to cultivate a mellow and kindly style, sometimes sarcastic, ironical, and cutting, perhaps, but more often full of a sweet and wholesome humor. This style can be learned to a considerable degree, for it is far from being entirely a gift of nature. It is the natural expression of the heart brimming with love and life, and such hearts alone should belong to writers of fiction. Dickens was a great master of this gracious, loving, humorous

style, and so was Thackeray. George Eliot lacked it rather markedly, and no doubt that is the reason why today, in spite of her great and masterful talents, she is read less than either of the two previously mentioned. Dickens and Thackeray are read constantly more and more for no other reason than the love and mellow sweetness with which their works are permeated. For this they are forgiven sins great enough to damn a full score of novelists who lack it, and their glaring errors are passed over with the blindness born only of love.

So we advise the young writer above everything else to cultivate the kindly, humorous style which wins by its sweetness, for that is the really perfect combination of narrative, description, and dialogue in a fusion so complete that neither writer nor reader is conscious of it.

III.

The Setting of a Story.

Before beginning to write a story, that is, before putting pen to paper, you must get your incident, your "soul" or moral, and your central character. All these things must be clearly in the mind. The original rough diamond must be cut and polished perfectly preparatory to setting in words. In actual practice one frequently works the story out by writing it, and no method is better, or even nearly so good. But the first draft must be completely thrown aside or recast if the story is to be perfectly set. After much practice a writer will be able to perfect a story in his mind so that the first draft will be sufficiently good. But the young writer will do best to sit down with pen in hand and write anything about the subject that comes into his mind. He should not trouble about setting, but plunge at once into describing with as much simplicity and directness as possible the events he wishes to narrate. Gradually the best form for the story will develop itself in the mind, and the story can be given an artistic setting. It is a great mistake to think of the setting first, however. The idea and all the details and events must be developed in the mind if not on paper before a really artistic setting can be given.

But when a story has been perfectl

conceived and is all ready to be put into artistic form, the practical suggestions of this chapter may be applied.

The back-ground of a story should always be the last thing to be chosen, but it is the first thing to consider when one comes to actual writing out. A story is much like a painting. Some pictures admit no especially back-ground, as for instance a picture of an interior. Other pictures, portraits for example, demand an artificial back-ground, and this artificial back-ground is so chosen as best to contrast with and bring out the figure. In story writing it appears to be simple portraits that need least back-ground, for a story is a picture of the interior of a mind, while a painting gives the exterior of the expression. This will suggest the ~~difference~~ reason of the difference about back-ground. "A Coward", for instance, is a simple description of a man, and needs no back-ground. "Happiness", however, shows us a little scene, the couple in Corsica happy because of love alone, and a back-ground is absolutely necessary. Maupassant opens with a description of a scene which is a perfect contrast ~~xxxxxxxx~~ to the scene in the story. The story is dark, therefore he chooses a light, bright scene,--a villa and fashionable people, surrounded with everything the world affords. He immediately touches on the common link, the common note of color if

it were a painting: he mentions love, which is of interest to rich and poor alike. In this case his setting describes people like those of his audience, the people who will read the story, and his mention of love at the very start indicates clearly in just what direction the interest of the tale will lie. Next the scene of his story is introduced with the utmost skill and grace, Corsica looming above the sea in the distance; and this strange apparition suggests the story, which is then told in the simplest possible narrative form, the events being described in the order in which they happened to the teller.

At the end the author comes back to his beginning. He started with love, he ends with love. The general rule is to start out with a statement of the idea which impresses you most, and end with this idea.

We have said a story is like a painting. When one first conceives a story, events and incidents are the chief thing in the mind; but when the story is written, the description looms up and fills the eye almost completely. A mere narrative without description (that is, setting) is like an outline charcoal head. The finished portrait presents the living subject to the mind. It is alive in color, action, and personality. Description is word painting. If one understands the art of painting with pigments, he ought

easily to understand the art of painting with words. When one paints a picture of a woman's face, for instance, he does not begin with details, he catches the pose, the action, the outline. The modeling of the face must be seen and done first in masses of light and shade. No sooner are these laid in than degrees of light and shade develop. The details work out in their true relations of importance. By beginning with the largest, the heaviest, the most important, simplicity and effectiveness are secured. In "The Necklace" observe how Maupassant paints a woman's character in words. He begins with the most striking fact of observation, the element which would strike you first if you saw the actual woman: "She was one of those pretty and charming girls who are sometimes, as if by a mistake of destiny, born in a family of clerks." He fixes her station in life, and this usually (in Europe, at least) determines a multitude of facts. The remainder of the first paragraph is devoted to an elaboration of this idea. The next paragraph begins, "She dressed plainly because she could not dress well, but she was as unhappy as though she had really fallen from her proper station." This sentence strikes the keynote of the story. The student will notice that the first paragraph determines the general character of the situation, the second strikes the keynote. In "Happiness" we

noticed that the first paragraph described a situation, the second struck the note of love. In "A Coward" the translator has apparently made an error in the first division into paragraphs, for the real first paragraph is the description contained in the first two. The third paragraph describes the hero as appearing to be a brave, dashing man, and ends with the mention of his opinion about duelling. The keynote is struck in a higher octave, as it were, or by the clever contrast of the appearance of the man with the reality which is to follow and which has been suggested to the reader already by the title, for the title tells us the man is a coward. The title should always indicate the main idea of the story if possible, but one will notice that Maupassant does not call his story "Happiness" and go on to speak of happiness in his second paragraph: he speaks of the idea with which the happiness is associated, namely "love". So his title is "A Coward" and he speaks of the man's dashing appearance in society.

We will not pursue our illustration from Maupassant, for his practice in this particular, though good, is more or less of a mannerism and is certainly no inflexible rule. One may begin the description in a hundred different ways, but this general principle should be followed:

mention the most general classification first and the other details in the order of individual peculiarity as concerns the interest of the story. Thus if you are telling the story of a place, locate it as in Asia, Africa, or America; if in America what nation, if in the United States what state, then what part of the state. These particular facts may or may not concern your story. If they do not, certainly they should not be mentioned. It is very rare that facts should be mentioned just to give an air of reality when they do not have a bearing on the story. Maupassant never mentions a thing which does not have a direct bearing on the story in hand. When one begins to write a story he should realize what facts have a bearing on the story and what not. Taking the body of those which do he should first mention the general facts and then the particular, showing as soon as possible what relation they have to the central idea, else the reader will find it difficult to be interested in them.

A story is like a scene of a play in a theatre, but the writer must put in the scenery as well as the actors, always remembering that a story is the description of the interior of a heart, not so much the exterior, and in this differs from the painted scenery of a theater. But before one makes his actors act in a story, he must give a vivid impression of

the place, surroundings, dress, and general manner of his characters, whether from the interior point of view or the exterior—it may be either as occasion demands. But a story is sure to be a failure without this picture in some form or other. Sometimes it is woven in with the narrative, sometimes placed at or near the beginning. But it must be somewhere. The young writer finds it naturally existing in his own imagination and fancies it must exist also in the mind of the reader. But this is seldom the case. One should take account of the stock of material he has on hand, and put down something in the written story to correspond to every detail of the picture in his own mind. A well known author in Boston once said to the writer that an unwritten story was like a quart of molasses in a measure, which when turned out stuck to the sides and so yielded but a pint. The young writer imagines a good story, but when he has written it out the story is not more than half so good as he fancied, and he wonders what is the matter. The truth is, half of it remains still in the mind: he has not put on paper all that he thought or felt or imagined, which went to make up the story as he conceived it.

The opposite fault of putting into a story description which is unnecessary is almost as fatal. This unnecessary description comes from the author's fancying that there ought to be description

of some kind, and not knowing what description to choose he describes anything and everything that comes into his head. What is really needed is description nicely calculated to produce a given effect, as with the scenery or costume of a theatre. Some scenery and some costume are used simply because there must be scenery and there must be costume; but an effective play has scenery and costume which directly aid in the development of the motive. The case is much the same with short story-writing: the best description is that which is chosen with direct reference to the motive of the tale.

But how shall one choose? That is the hard question, of course, and can only be answered by experiment. Would you know what will prove effective? First, observe what has proved effective in the best models, and then try a story of your own. When it is finished read it to a friend. If you keep your wits about you sufficiently you can easily tell from his expression of face or your own consciousness whether a passage is good or bad, effective or weak. If it is weak, all you can do is to throw it out bodily and write another. But the young writer must remember that the test of a story is its power to hold the interest of some particular real person.

IV.

Plot Construction.

Writers of plays understand perfectly well the principles of dramatic construction, and that an interesting plot consists more in the skill with which the writer leads the reader on from point to point than in any good fortune in getting dramatic material in the first place. A most interesting story can often be made out of poor material if the details of incident are so arranged as to excite the interest of the reader. Dramatic construction is purely a matter of arrangement of the various incidents, large and small; but it is a most delicate task and only a master can make an otherwise commonplace story interesting by this means alone.

The question which many young writers nowadays put to themselves when they are writing a story is, "Would a human being in real life act in just this way?" This is an excellent question to ask, but if you mean to make an interesting story another question must follow, namely, "Will this situation be most effective in bringing out my central idea?"

Real life is like the whole earth, a ball eight thousand miles in diameter, on which we are mere pigmies. This great earth is fearfully and wonderfully complicated, with mountains, oceans, rivers, and strata of rocks, besides a great moulten mass inside. A million items go

to make up the events of everyday life. If one of those million items were omitted all might be different, for instance how different would they be if the sun should cease to shine or the moon to revolve about the earth! Life is so complicated that we cannot understand it. A story is intended to help us understand the principles and phases of the great world of emotion and motive, and ought to be a little world in itself, practically, just as a globe is a miniature of the earth, and this miniature of the world of emotion while it is much simplified does give us certain general ideas we could not possibly get from a section of the real world, which is all we can get within the range of our eye at one time. The realists claim that we should study the world by taking a slice of it. A better plan would seem to be the making of a model like a school globe.

A short story ought not to be so much a description of real life just as one sees it--a photographic reproduction, as a skilfully made model. An artistically painted portrait is much better than a photograph just because it catches and accentuates the important characteristics of the face, leaving out a score of trifling details which mean nothing one can comprehend and are really disturbing elements. A story should not be a reproduction of life, but the creation of a little model of the world which will bring

out strongly certain truths and features without superfluous distracting details.

If we go on the principle that a short story must be created rather than imitated we get an entirely new point of view concerning plot construction. We take our lump of clay (our material for a story) and model it with reference first of all to its own balance and unity and perfection, and after that we make it as much like the real object before us as we can. If it is well constructed, well and harmoniously modelled, then the more it is like the original in real life the better the story. But if we try first to make it an imitation, neglecting its own harmony and proportion and beauty as an object by itself, our effort to be true to nature fails also.

The method of making a plot interesting, that is, constructing the items of incident from point to point so as to lead the attention on, has been developed only in playwriting, and the best models of perfection in this direction are Shakespere's plays. The general method is as follows, however:

Most stories are stories of some personality. In such stories one begins with the central figure. He is introduced, his character is determined as well as possible, just as it is before anything happens to him. The writer thinks carefully of what characteristics will come out in the development of the story and

describes these. A good writer never brings in any characteristic that does not have some bearing on the future development. This character-study the reader may see clearly in the first three pages of "The Necklace". Mme. Loisel is pretty fully set forth, but every one of the items has a bearing on the story that is about to be told. At the end the fact is incidentally thrown in that she had a friend who was rich. This furnishes a little contrast to set off her own position, but it is really introduced to provide for the incident of the borrowing that comes later.

If the writer can interest the reader in his central character he has the beginning of his plot construction. In short stories this is the easiest method, but there are other ways. In "Hamlet" we begin with the ghost. The ghost figures as the determining character through the whole play, and to interest the reader or hearer in the ghost is enough to hold his attention and draw out his expectation. Drawing out the interest is like catching a fish. You must bait your hook and get the fish to swallow it. After that by skill you draw him in. If you can catch the interest of the reader at the beginning of your story you can by skill lead him on successfully. But the first and all-important object is to catch his interest in the first place with a bit of real life

and the promise of more. Maupassant catches the interest by describing Mme. Loisel. Shakespere catches the interest by the ghost scene.

Shakespere always brings out his bait with a little incident that illustrates and suggests the central motive of the play. In "Romeo and Juliet" we have the opening scene a street brawl between the rival houses, which suggests the hatred of the two houses of Montague and Capulet, out of which comes the whole difficulty. In "The Merchant of Venice" the opening scene shows Bassanio borrowing money of Antonio, who in turn borrowed of the Jew, about which centres the interest of the whole play.

A play is more like a novel than like a short story, for in so long a production as a play or a novel it is impossible to begin by describing a character, because the reader would get tired before the description is finished. In the longer production, also, there is a group of characters, who in combination work out the plot, while a short story turns about the life and action of one leading character to whom all the others are subservient. But in either case, the first thing to be done is to interest the reader by some means or other in the thing (whatever it may be) which makes the story go, the cause that lies at the root of the action. If you take the illustration of modeling a ball, it is

finding the centre of the ball. No sculptor in trying to model a cannon ball, for instance, would begin at one side. He always begins at the centre with a little round lump of clay and builds out. If he is modeling a man he begins with a little round lump of clay on a stick for the head. Gradually he develops the head from the interior outward, and then he has a point to which he can refer everything else and balance the whole figure.

So much depends on starting at the right point that perhaps a few more illustrations might be in place here. The reader should observe that the initial idea or incident is the centre about which the whole subsequent interest centres. It is absolutely necessary to get at the centre just as quickly as possible, though sometimes one has to do a little boring in order to get there. One must start with the reader's natural, normal life, just as you must bring your baited hook near where a fish happens to be. But unless the bait is on a direct line to your hand and you are ready to pul in, your fish swallows the bait and shies off. The mental process is thinking of the reader and of your central idea at the same time. You must use all your powers to catch the reader, but have the line ready to pull him straight in.

It is said that most manuscript readers after looking at the beginning of a story

pass to the end. The end of a story is commonly the kernel of the idea in the original conception, and in writing the progress of the story from the beginning to the end is determined almost entirely by the end. A starting point of interest may be secured, but this once in hand the writer must turn his eyes steadfastly toward the denouement and shape his story accordingly. This is the dramatic incident, the surprise, the effective climax. Every one knows that it is important to the reader to have an interest in "how the story is coming out." The ideal story writer will accomplish two things at the very start: he will tell enough about the climax to make the reader intensely interested to know what it is going to be, and also he will take good care not to disappoint the expectation he rouses in the finished result. The expectation must be exactly proportioned to the result. If the expectation is great and the climax trivial, the reader is disgusted. If the expectation is small and the climax really great, the reader is not prepared for it and fails to appreciate it.

In selecting a dramatic conclusion several characteristics must be sought. First, the climax must be unexpected, and an unexpected event or action is much better than the presentation of an unexpected general idea,--that is, something unexpected ought to <u>happen</u>. Second, this event must be not only unexpected but

at the same time perfectly natural. If it is unnatural the reader exclaims, "Absurd!" and throws the story aside. If it is both unexpected and natural, he says, "How strange I did not think of that!" and is accordingly deeply interested. Stories that end simply and naturally are usually commonplace, and stories that end unexpectedly are often unnatural and absurd. Which climax is the worse it would be hard to tell. But valuable story telling is chiefly found in the ability to discover some idea that is perfectly simple and natural, but new, unlooked for. This is much more than a trick: it is real knowledge of life. There is a great deal of the trick in it, but in Maupassant's stories one will find more real life than trick, whichever the story you select.

As we have hinted above, the dramatic construction of a story from the beginning to the end is a matter of creating just the right degree of expectation, not too much or two little, and this really requires a great deal of cleverness. The beginning, as we have said in the earlier part of this chapter, gives the clue to the denouement. Something is described that must bring about some conclusion. A problem is presented which must be solved. In the beginning are all the elements of the situation. The question immediately arises as to how the conclusion worked itself out of the situation, and indeed what the conclusion really was.

As the writer proceeds from his problem to his conclusion he tells everything except the vital point. Just the thing that happened he is very careful to conceal. The reader may know in a general way what it must be. If he is at all clever he should be able to guess this, for all the facts in the case must be before him, and if he puts them together properly he will know. But the actual material event which happens must be held strictly in reserve.

In dramatic development the writer sets forth facts and ideas which bring the reader nearer and nearer to the conclusion. The reader must see and understand that each idea brings him nearer or he will lose patience and skip. At the same time he must be held back while the story moves in its own even way, like fate. The attitude of the author in telling his story is of one who is perfectly cool-headed and indifferent about the conclusion because he knows it perfectly well, and is entirely confident of his ground. He walks straight ahead calmly and steadily, never turning aside, never pausing unnecessarily, but also never hurrying. The whole secret of dramatic construction, when once you have a dramatic situation to construct, is to go ahead steadily, telling every detail that has the least importance but never stopping for a detail that has not its definite place in the development. To

hold the mind steadily on its course in this way is possible only to a master, for even the somewhat experienced writer will falter at times, will stumble a little, or grow tired and halt, or rush on with disastrous haste. But the more evenly and steadily one can proceed, the more perfect will be the dramatic construction of the story. Maupassant seldom wavers for even a moment.

In practice the young writer should consider first his conclusion. If he feels that he has a good dramatic conclusion, he sits down to write his story. He finds it exceedingly hard to begin; but the rule for beginning is this: Ask what caused the catastrophe. When the writer has determined that he should plunge at once into a description of it. When he has once described the situation he has only to go straight on to the conclusion. The difference between a short story and a novel is that in a short story the interest proceeds on a straight line from the situation to the conclusion, while in a novel the writer has to go back and bring up various elements which in combination produce the conclusion. But a short story proceeds on a single line.

In the chapter on the setting of the story we have spoken of various things that come before the description of the situation or the determining cause or the determining character. But until one has become very skilful he should in

actual writing leave these trimmings, if we may call them so, until the last. His natural starting point is the situation with which the story starts. That is the foundation of the perfect structure. A house when it is built may have a lawn in front of it and be approached by walks and drives. But the builder builds his house first and grades his lawn and drives afterward. The builder of a story should do the same.

V.

Imagination and Reality.

If one succeeds once in getting the right point of view in fiction writing, that a story has for its object the expression of some idea, some principle of life, some moral, or some curious fact in nature, or some strange event, or some humorous view of humanity, or some pathetic view, or some charming and sweet view, or some fresh and invigorating view,--if the writer once thoroughly understands that a story must have an object and not be told simply for the sake of telling a story, then it becomes simple enough to say that the whole structure should be so arranged and built up as to bring out this one idea, whatever it may be, with the greatest possible clearness and force. As a player on a piano will strive consciously to secure just the right time, and movement, and loudness or softness, and just the right harmony of all the varying notes to bring out his musical theme, so the writer playing upon the hearts of his readers will look with scrupulous anxiety to see that he gets just the right movement and time, just the right suggestiveness and just the right reserve, and of course just the right harmony of notes,--that is, just the right arrangement of details and events. It would seem preposterous to let any outside circumstance determine for a writer of music the selection of chords,

much less the admission of discords; but that is exactly what a writer of fiction does when he tells a story just as it happened in real life. His object should have been to play upon the heart of the reader a beautiful tune of life: instead he produces a jangle of discords.

In these latter days the fact has been somewhat lost sight of that literature, above all story writing, is a work of creative imagination. Fiction is indeed supposed to be created, and we talk about it as untrue and imaginary; but the young writer fancies that after all the author of a novel knew the facts in the case from real life, and judging that they would make a good story set them down in order without creating much from the material of his own brain. The young writer does not see exactly how to create and so surreptitiously steals from nature, trusting that nobody will find it out, or if it is found out that he will be in the very best company.

This is the extreme opposite of the other view that fiction is a mere fabrication, and consequently bad. Neither extreme must be taken too seriously, but it is only fair that the two should be set up against each other, and the present writer is not the first to do it. An eminent critic once said, "In fiction everything is true but the names and dates, in history nothing is true but the names and dates."

The proposition that the description of a real incident just as it happened is untrue to life seems a paradox, but a little explanation will make it clear. Real life is too large and complicated to be fully understood. Certain persons do certain things under certain circumstances: why? No one can tell. It may have been a natural, spontaneous motive from the heart, or it may have been some trivial accident. The wind may have blown the curtains, which suggested a forgotten memory, which may have made Jane say, "Yes, I could be happy" when John asked how she would enjoy coming to live in his new house on the hill. The relater of this incident would naturally that Jane made that remark because she loved John, and when afterward she denied it she would be called fickle-hearted. In a real event you can never know what possible forces and facts are present which are unknown to you and must therefore be omitted in the accounting, and the absence of these throws an entirely false light over all the facts that are observed and stated as <u>the</u> facts of the case. When the imagination creates a situation there can be no question as to whether the whole case is stated or not. The mind which created knows what was created, and conclusions drawn from those facts are logical and just. To be true, the creation must be constructed on exactly the same principles that obtain in real

life. The author by long study, observation, and thought discovers certain principles of life, and by the use of these principles he constructs a life which is much more simple than the infinite complication of real life, but is subject to the same laws and far easier to understand. In real life a thousand currents cross each other, and counter cross, and cross again. Life is a maze of endless continuity, to which, nevertheless, we desire to find some key. Fiction is a picture of life to which there is a key, and by analogy it suggests explanations of real life. It is of far more value to be true to the principles of life than to the outer facts. The outer facts are fragmentary and uncertain, mere passing suggestions, sights in the darkness. The principles of life are a clew of thread which may guide the human judgment through many dark and difficult places. It is to these that the writer of fiction must be true.

In a real incident the writer sees an idea which he thinks may illustrate a principle he knows of. (See analysis of ideas of "The Odd Number" in Part First, Chapter IV.) The observed fact must illustrate the principle, but he must shape it to that end. A carver takes a block of wood and sets out to make a vase. First he cuts away all the useless parts. The writer should reject all the useless facts connected with his story and re-

serve only what illustrates his idea. Often, however, the carver finds his block of wood too small, or imperfect. Perfect blocks of wood are rare, and so are perfect stories in real life. The carver cuts out the imperfect part and fits in a new piece of wood. Perhaps the whole base of his vase must be made of another piece and screwed on. It is quite usual that the whole setting of a story must come from another source. One has observed life in a thousand different phases, just as a carver has accumulated about him scores of different pieces of wood varying in shape and size to suit almost any possible need. When a carver makes a vase he takes one block for the main portion, the starting point in his work, and builds up the rest from that. The story writer takes one real incident as the chief one, and perfects it artistically by adding dozens of other incidents that he has observed. The writer creates only in the sense that the wood carver creates his vase. He does not create ideas out of nothing, any more than the carver creates the separate blocks of wood. The writer may coin his own soul into substance for his stories, but creating out of one's mind and creating out of nothing are two very different things. The writer observes himself, notices how his mind works, how it behaves under given

circumstances, which gives him material exactly the same in kind as that which he gains from observing the working of other people's minds.

But the carver in fashioning a vase thinks of the effect it will produce, when it is finished, on the mind of his customer, or on the mind of any person who appreciates beauty, and his whole end and aim is for this result. He cuts out what he thinks will hinder, and puts in what he thinks will help. He certainly does a great deal more than present polished specimens of the various kinds of woods he has collected. The creative writer--who intends to do something more than present polished specimens of real life--must work on the same plan with the carver. He must write for his reader, for his audience.

But just what is it to write for an audience? The essential element in it is <u>some message</u> to <u>somebody</u>. A message is of no value unless it is to somebody in particular. Shouting messages into the air when you do not know whether any one is at hand to hear, would be equally foolish whether a writer gave forth his message of inspiration in that way, or a telegraph boy shouted his message in front of the telegraph office in the hope that the man to whom the message was directed might be passing, or that some of his friends might overhear it.

The newspaper reporter goes to see a

fire, finds out all about it, writes it up, and sends it to his paper. The paper prints it for the readers who are anxious to know what the fire was and the damage it did. The reporter does not write it up in the spirit of doing it for the pleasure there is in it, nor does he allow himself to do it in the manner his mood dictates. He writes so that certain people will get certain facts and ideas. The facts he had nothing to do with creating, nor did he make the desire of the people. He was simply a messenger, a purveyor.

The writer of stories, we have said, must write for an audience, but he does not go and hunt up his audience, find out its needs, and then tell to it his story. He simply writes for the audience that he knows, that others have prepared for him. To know human life, to know what the people of the United States really need, that is a great task, a work for a genius. It resembles the building up of a daily paper, with its patronage and its study of the public pulse. But the reporter has little or nothing to do with that. Likewise the ordinary writer should not trouble himself about so large a problem, at least until he has mastered the simpler ones. Writing for an audience if one wants to get printed in a certain magazine, is writing those things which one finds by experience the readers of that magazine, as represented in the edi-

tor, want to read. Or one may write with his mind on those readers of the magazine whom he knows personally. The essential point is that the writer of effective stories must cease to think of himself when he begins to write and turn his mental vision steadily upon likes or needs of his possible readers, selecting some definite reader in particular if need be. At any rate, he must not write vaguely for people he does not know. If he pleases those he does know, he may also please many he does not know. The best he can do is to take the audience he thoroughly understands, though it be an audience of one, and write for that audience something that will be of value, in the way of amusement or information or inspiration.

The course of success in literary art is often like this, we will say in the case of a woman: 1. She has an idea and she writes it out just as she thinks it, fancying it may please a certain friend of hers she has in mind. Intuition guides her, and guides her well, in the form she gives her idea, and the result is an unusually good story, though perhaps crudely expressed. 2. The success of that story rouses her ambition and she looks about consciously to see what she can do in the literary field. But self-consciousness has spoiled her intuition. She wants to do something without knowing what she wants to do, or for what purpose she

should do it. The result is abortive efforts. 3. Finally some one sets her a task, or she is intelligent enough to set it for herself. She may think of something she knows ought to be said to certain people, and she goes about saying it. As soon as she does that she is beginning to accomplish something of real value, and the rest of her life is spent in learning how to do that thing in the best way and in doing it.

Story writing has for its object to present to somebody some principle of life. We do not mean a moral principle nor an intellectual principle, but some law on which life is constructed, or something about life that can be applied practically to the heart or mind or soul of the reader. Being an effective story writer is presenting some conception of life so that somebody else can understand it and use it. This is the whole secret of dramatic construction, setting the mind on the end to be accomplished and then using every available means to accomplish it. If the young writer can once get this clearly in mind he will have little difficulty in selecting the facts he should put into a story and those he should leave out, and in shaping up those he does use so that his finished story will be the best possible vehicle for his idea. Just how to do this he must learn for himself, but once on the right road his common sense will be a sufficient guide to success.

VI.

A Story Rewritten.

Nothing is so much a matter of pure art which can be learned and must be learned if one is to have it, as the dramatic construction of a story. Women amateurs succeed more often than men in writing good stories because their intuitions are so strong they absorb unconsciously, as it were, the principles of construction; but their knowledge being purely intuitional they are liable at any time to failure. But if there is any one thing in the art of short story writing that can be taught it is this. Nothing will require harder study than dramatic construction, but once mastered nothing will help the young writer more.

The following story was written by a clever newspaper man. It possesses every quality to make it a charming and beautiful story except dramatic construction. The writer fails wholly from lack of knowledge of the art he would practise. Yet there are very evident marks of the effort he has made to remedy this deficiency.

The facts are almost exactly as he states them, and came under his observation in the pursuit of his profession of reporter. This is the paragraph he made of the actual incident for one of the New York dailies:

A Little Girl Saved Him From Sing Sing.

"William McIntyre will bless a certain little girl friend he has to the day of his death, for she probably saved him a good term at Sing Sing. On November 26 last the jewelery store of T. Conant, 1721 Third avenue, was broken into and Wm. McIntyre was arrested near the spot with some of the jewelry in his possession. Today the police department withdrew its charges against him in spite of the damning evidence, and he was released. It seems that little Mamie Edwards living just across the street at 1722 was looking out of her window rather late and saw another man perform the robbery, pushing over McIntyre, who was drunk, and doubtless leaving some of the jewelry with him. It is said that Mamie made her way all alone to Headquarters and told her story to the Superintendent himself in such a way that after an investigation McIntyre has been released. Mamie is only six years old."

He then realized what material there was in it for a charming short story, and proceeded to write it out as follows, with a view to having it printed under the head of fiction in some weekly or Sunday paper:

The Bobbin' Man.

"Is Mr. Byrnes at home?"

The young man's eyes rested on a little figure that had stood for some minutes near him, unnoticed. Such figures were

not often seen in Mulberry street, on the steps of the big marble building which is the home of the central Department of the Metropolitan police.

A little girl, perhaps six years old, clad in a dark red merino frock and gray coat! Beneath the white frill of her bonnet hung bright curls of hair, and from the prettiest little face in the world two large brown eyes looked straight at the young man, who stared at her curiously but not unkindly. Surprise had drawn his hands from his pockets. He had lost some of the confident air that belongs to men in the newspaper business, when he found voice to reply uncertainly: "I do n't know. If you really want him you might come in and see."

"I guess I will. I 've been ever so far. I b'lieve I 'm lost, too."

The small voice faltered and the brown eyes looked anxious.

"I hope not," said the young man cheerfully and holding his hand out. "Come along and we 'll find out."

Hand in hand the two went up stairs.

The policeman who stood in the hall looked curiously at the child as he opened the door. Then he nodded to her companion.

"Lost?" he interrogated.

"She 's going to see the Superintendent," answered the man.

Sergeant Hurleby, a big, clumsy man, with a great grisly beard, leaned over his

desk writing figures in little squares on a sheet of paper headed "Lost Children", when the couple entered the Bureau of Information.

"Here 's a case for you, Sergeant," said the young man leading the child up to him.

Sergeant Hurleby looked up at the speaker, then down at the little girl. Then he put down his pen.

"My!" he exclaimed, "what a pretty little lady! What eyes! What nice eyes! So you 're lost are you?"

"O no, sir! I 've come to see Mr. Byrnes. Are you Mr. Byrnes?"

Sergeant Hurleby took the child on his knee.

"What might your name be, little one?" he asked kindly.

"Madge Kendrick. I 'm just seven, and I 've been looking for Mr. Byrnes all day."

"All day, have you? And what do you want with him?"

Madge looked around at the two men in blue coats who had gotten up from their desks and were standing near the Sergeant. She tugged nervously at a bright button on her questioner's coat. Then she said anxiously,

"It 's about the rob'ry."

The two men in blue coats laughed. The young man who had escorted her looked interested. Sergeant Hurleby took one

little pink hand in his.

"The robbery? Well, well! what a small sized detective!"

"Mr. Byrnes is home, is n't he?" insisted Madge somewhat impatiently, her small mind evidently struggling under a load that she could no longer carry.

"Yes, he is at home. We 'll see what we can do for you."

With Madge in his arms the Sergeant walked out of the room, across the hall, and into the outer office of Superintendent Byrnes.

"There 's a story in that for you," remarked one of the blue-coated men.

"Yes," remarked the young man, "and a good one."

The door of the Superintendent's office closed after the ill-assorted pair; closed quickly to within two inches, then settled into a decided, almost imperceptible motion until the latch sprang with a snap.

"Superintendent at leisure?" asked Sergeant Hurleby.

"Yes," answered a pleasant-faced gentleman, who was examining a map on the wall behind a railing. "Go in, Sergeant!"

Another man, in a room to the right, fenced off by a high railing of iron fretwork, looked into the outer office and seeing Madge remarked, "What a pretty child!"

"Detective child!" said Sergeant Hurleby

smiling and passing through a swinging gate at the end of the room. "This is Mr. Byrnes, Madge."

Madge struggled from his arms to the floor, and ran lightly to the big desk behind which a man with a partially bald head and drooping mustache sat reading a paper.

"Oh! Are you Mr. Byrnes?" she exclaimed with a gasp of satisfaction, putting both hands on his arm.

Nothing can startle the Superintendent of the New York police. He merely raised his eyes inquiringly to the Sergeant.

"A little visitor to see you, Superintendent," explained the latter, making a half salute.

"Well, little one," said the Superintendent in hearty tones, throwing down his paper.

"Oh, I 'm so glad to find you at last! I 've walked so far and I 'm so tired! Mamma do n't know I 'm here. I 've been at grandma's, and I 've just come to tell you about the rob'ry. Mamma do n't know anything about it, nor Willie, nor Gracie, nor any of them. But you won't hurt him, will you?"

Madge looked unflinchingly into the keen eyes before which guilty souls trembled and gave up their secrets.

"No," answered the Superintendent, softening his usually commanding voice, "we do not hurt any one here. Tell me all about it. Sergeant, a chair for the

lady. Thank you. Now, begin at the beginning."

"My name 's Madge Kendrick."

"Is it? Well, Miss Kendrick, just sit here close to me and tell me what it is all about."

"Mr. Byrnes," Madge began solemnly, "I saw the rob'ry did."

"Yes?"

The Superintendent looked very mild indeed, now, as he stroked Madge's curls gently, as if to encourage her.

"Yes. Our house is right across the street. I always like to get out of bed and look at the stars. They 're very bright on our street. And mamma scolds me. So Gracie what I love, she slept with me. Then I said I would be good, and Gracie did n't sleep with me any more. Night afore last the moon came in the window; it was a lovely big moon and I wanted to see it so much that I got up to take just one peep."

Madge lowered her voice mysteriously, but there was no tremor of fear in it.

"And so," echoed the Superintendent, "you got up to look at the moon?"

"Oh, it was so bright! I could see the man in it. And there was another man in the street, right in front of the jeweler ~~wind~~ store. He looked so funny. He bobbed from one side to the other, and he could n't stand up straight at all. When he went to walk he bobbed worse than ever. The man in the moon laughed. I saw

him."

"Drunk!" murmurred Sergeant Hurleby, who stood leaning against the desk.

"Go on, Madge," said the Superintendent gently.

"Well, a man came along and said something to him; then he pushed the bobbin' man and he fell in front of the jeweler winder. Then the other man ran away ever so fast, and a policeman came and took the bobbin' man."

Madge's voice assured her hearers that the climax of her tale had been reached. The Superintendent slipped his hand into a pigeon hole in his desk and took out a folded paper. On it was written in a neat round hand, "Attempted burglary." Then in another writing, "William McIntyre, 26--breaking into the jewelry store of T. Conant, 1721 Fifth Avenue, November 26, 1892."

"I climbed into bed quick," continued Madge after a pause during which she seemed to enjoy the importance of her recital. "In the morning when Gracie took me to breakfast, mamma and all of them was talking about the rob'ry. But I was afraid to say anything 'cause I told mamma I would be good and not get out of bed."

The Superintendent looked at Sergeant Hurleby.

"And so, Madge, you came all the way to tell me?"

"Oh, yes, and I 've had a hard time to find you, and once I was almost runned

over. But, Mr. Byrnes, you have n't hung the bobbin' man, have you?"

"No, we have not hung him."

Madge clapped her hands joyfully. "I'm so glad." Then she looked at the big beard of the Sergeant and grew serious. "My papa has a beard like that. I 'm afraid he may scold me when I get back. I must go now. It 's a long way."

Superintendent Byrnes leaned over and kissed Madge as she slipped her arms about his neck.

"We 'll see you home, little lady," said he warmly. "Sergeant?"

"Yes, Superintendent."

"Let an officer take Madge safely home and explain the matter to her parents."

"Yes, Superintendent."

"Goodbye, Mr. Byrnes," called the child, as the Sergeant led her to the door.

"Goodbye, Madge," he answered.

Left alone he bent over his desk and wrote rapidly a few words. Then he pressed half a dozen ivory buttons. The faint echo of a bell sounded through the padded doors, and a stout man appeared.

"To Sergeant Bell," ordered the Superintendent. The man took the paper and closed the door behind him. That afternoon William McIntyre was released.

Superintendent Byrnes leaned his head on his hands, in an attitude of deep thought. His eyes wandered to a picture on the wall in which a policeman was defending a kneeling woman from a mob. It embodied Law and Disorder. His eyes

took in the details of the picture, for he noticed that the woman's hair was held up by a bright ribbon. But he was not thinking of it.

Then he turned to the unfinished newspaper article.

Let us now reconstruct this story in accordance with the principles that have been laid down in the preceding pages. In the story as written above we have our material thoroughly in hand and the process of building up the story may be omitted here, and we will consider the changes that are to be made as they logically follow one another rather than in the natural sequence.

First, the title: The title should indicate the motive or meaning of the story. "The Bobbin' Man" is merely fanciful. The story was about the little girl and not about the drunken man at all. The whole incident turns on the courage of Madge in coming to Headquarters to release from injustice the man she had seen, and this is made more interesting by the fact of her intelligence in understanding the situation and what was to be done. One might choose as a title "Her Courage", but this would be imperfect because it gives no hint of her

intelligence in understanding the situation and what was to be done. A title must be sufficiently comprehensive, even if it is vague. "A Child" would serve very well, implying simply that the remarkable thing in the story was that the incident was effected by a mere child though it was well worthy of an older person. It intensifies this idea to substitute for the very vague "A Child" "A Little Child". This title is not ideal, but a perfect title is a matter of good fortune and patient search, and this will show the process of the search, which the student is at liberty to carry farther if he wishes.

Perhaps some one may object that "The Bobbin' Man" had as much to do with the story as Maupassant's "Necklace" had to do with his story of that name. It will be observed, however, that the necklace, its quality, its essential characteristic of existence, figuratively stood for the vanity in Mme. Loisel which was the underlying motive of the story Maupassant wrote. "The Necklace" translated out of the figure of speech into plain English means "Her Vanity". "The Bobbin' Man" was merely an accident, and a thousand other men or events might have brought out the same qualities in the child. A good title for the simple narrative of events which is printed above would be "Madge's Adventure". But the title "A Little Child" suggests the moral principle of the story by reminding the

reader of the Bible quotation, "And a little child shall lead them."

Almost every story of incident needs a setting. Only pure character studies plunge at once into the main theme. The introductory setting which we will give this story is chosen expressly to bring out the interior significance of the story along with a perfect contrast to the scene that is about to be described. The intention is to set up as strong a situation as possible which must be over-balanced in the mind of the reader by the innocence and nobility of the child.

We will now present the story in its new form, simply prefacing it with the remark that the smallest possible number of changes has been made, and these all lie in the direction of focusing the interest of the story on a single point instead of scattering it vaguely about. The point chosen, as indicated in the title, is not the only point from which the story might be viewed. Each writer will choose a different point. That does not matter. But whatever the point chosen, toward that and that alone must look the beginning, the ending, and the development. It must not, like the original story, begin with the child, proceed with the reporter and police sergeants, and end with the Superintendent. It must begin with the child and end with the child, and stick closely to the child all the way through.

A Little Child

It was two o'clock in the morning at the police headquarters of the Daily Graphic, and the last little story of a fire had gone in by telephone to the night editor. The four men who constituted the "force" at this particular centre of public information were sitting about the dingy room with cigars in their mouths and glasses at their hands, their feet comfortably reposing on tables, piles of books, or other like suitable supports. Work had been light and they had got to talking, and now were loth to leave off.

"After all the crime and misery and wretchedness and dishonesty and brutal lack of unselfishness which I've seen in wandering about this city of New York," said one man between the puffs of his cigar, "I must say my belief in the innate goodness of the human heart is a pretty slim thing. I could much more easily believe in the total depravity of the human race, the way those old Puritans did."

"I don't know that I am quite as bad as that," remarked Phillips, "but I am convinced that nobody, I don't care who he is, even a saint on earth, does anything without in some way seeing that good will come to himself for it in the end. He may deceive himself, but after all he does his philanthropic deeds with the ultimate view that they will increase his chances of getting into

heaven some day, even if he has no nearer motive than that."

The three other men listened patiently to this philosophy, and it was plain that all agreed more or less with Phillips that the human heart has few if any natural and spontaneous impulses of unselfishness. But after a pause Johnson, familiarly called "Dutchy", who had not spoken before, said with slow emphasis,--

"I suppose you 're about right. Any way I 'm not saying you 're not, only I have just been thinking of a little thing I saw the other day. I made a ~~little~~ paragraph about it, but I thought I 'd make something more of it some day, it was so pretty. There are exceptions to all rules, you know, and I think this is an exception to the rule that all human beings are constantly on the look out for No. 1 and nobody else."

"You 're thinking of that little girl?" suggested Ryles. "I remember. Give us the story. It was a mighty pretty thing and right on this point, I should say."

The two others were anxious to hear, so "Dutchy" told the following story:

"About four o'clock in the afternoon I was going across to Headquarters on some errand or other, I forget what. I was in a hurry to get off to dinner early and so was speeding myself a little more than usual, perhaps. I remember I went up the marble steps about three at a time and was making a rush for the door without

seeing what I was doing, when I stumbled over a little bunch of something which on recovery I found to be a little girl, say six years old. She had on a grey coat and a red merino frock, and a little white frilled bonnet that partly covered a beautiful curly head of bright golden brown hair. I was so astonished to find her under my feet that I just stood and looked at her, and I recall now perfectly her round brown eyes and sweet innocent face. If she 'd been a few years older I should have been 'dead struck on her' without a doubt.

"Said I, 'What do you want here. I did n't hurt you, did I?'

"'Oh, no, you did n't hurt me,' she said, 'only just at first I did n't know who you were. I want to see Mr. Byrnes. Can you tell me where he is?'

"I forgot all about what I was after, if I recollect right, and that I was intending to go to dinner extra early to meet an appointment in the evening. I said,--

"'What do you want with Mr. Byrnes? Can't you tell me just as well?'

"She did n't answer that question, but she said she guessed she was lost, and that she had come a long ways and had been walking all day, and that she wanted very particularly to see Mr. Byrnes. I noticed that her feet were loaded with dust, and so was her dress. She looked pretty tired out, and it was plain she

had had a long tramp of it, and a hot one, too. One could see in her eyes that she was a plucky little piece.

"I took her hand and told her to come along with me, and we went up stairs. Old Blucher was standing in the hall and asked if I 'd picked up a stray. I told him she wanted to see the Superintendent, and took her in to Hurleby as a lost child. The Sergeant was sitting at his desk writing, but when he saw her he just laid down his pen and said,

"My! what a pretty little lady! What nice eyes! So you 're lost, are you?" he asked her.

"'Oh, no, sir; I 've come to see Mr. Byrnes," she said as quietly as you please. 'Are you Mr. Byrnes?'

"Old Hurleby had to haul out and take her up in his lap. He asked her what her name was, and she said,

"My name's Madge Kendrick. I 'll be seven tomorrow, and I 've been looking for Mr. Byrnes all day."

"'All day?' said Hurleby. 'And what do you want with Mr. Byrnes?'

"One or two officers had come up, and when she saw us all looking at her she began to look a little shy, and she turned round to the Sergeant and pulled nervously at the brass buttons on his coat. After a while she said in an embarrassed tone,--

"'It 's about the rob'ry.'

"'The robbery?' said Hurleby. 'Well, well! what a small sized detective we

have!'

"At that she looked somewhat puzzled; but she was full of her errand and not to be diverted, for the next moment she drew back her head a little and said with as much dignity as you can imagine,-

"'Mr. Byrnes is home, is n't he?'

"The men laughed, and I could n't help laughing, too, though you can imagine I preferred to have her tell her story, if she had one, to Byrnes himself rather than just then. So I said to Hurleby,

"'Go over and find out if Byrnes won't see her.'

"'Oh, that 'll be all right," said he. So we all went over to the Superintendent's office, where Byrnes was just getting ready to go home. Hurleby had carried her over in his arms, but when she got there and saw Byrnes she seemed to know at once who he was, and insisted on getting down and walking up to him in proper fashion. She went straight around his big desk and ~~without hesitation~~ laid her little hand upon his arm without saying a word at first.

"'Well, little one!' said Byrnes, being in an extra good mood. 'What can I do for you?'

"'Are you Mr. Byrnes?' she asked.

"'Yes, I 'm Mr. Byrnes,' he answered.

"'I 'm so glad to find you,' she said in a tone of relief. 'I 've walked ever so far, and I 'm tired. Mamma does n't know I 'm here. I 've been at grandma's,

and I 've come to tell you about the rob'ry. Mamma does n't know anything about it, nor Willie, nor Gracie, nor any of them. But you won't hurt him, will you?'

"She looked at him sharply, I can tell you, as if she would look his old grey eyes straight through. He winked a little and said,

"We do n't hurt anybody here. But who is he?'

"'Why, the man,' she said. 'I saw the rob'ry did myself.'

"The Superintendent began to look at her softly, and then took her up in his arms. I have an idea he came about as near falling in love with her as I did. His eyes with the heavy brows and the seamed old face and the big hands made a fine contrast with her pretty little figure, and Byrnes seemed to appreciate it, too. He looked at her as if he were her own father, and proud of it into the bargain, and then he made her tell her little story.

"'You see,' said she, 'our house is right on the street. I always like to get out of bed and look at the stars. They 're very bright on our street. Mamma scolds me for it, so Gracie she used to sleep with me. Then I said I 'd be good, and Gracie did n't sleep with me any more. Night b'fore last the moon came in the window; it was a lovely big moon, and I wanted to see it so much I got

up just to take one little look.'

"She lowered her voice mysteriously, but evidently she had no fear. The Superintendent encouraged her a little and she went on confidently,--

"'It was so bright I could see the man in it. And there was another man in the street, right in front of the jeweler store. He looked so funny. He bobbed from one side to the other, and he could n't stand up straight at all. When he went to walk he bobbed worse than ever.'

"'Drunk!' commented the Sergeant, who stood leaning against the desk.

"'Go on, Madge,' said Byrnes gently.

"'Well,' said she, 'a man came along and said something to him; then he pushed the bobbin' man and he fell in front of the jeweler windo'. Then the other man ran away, ever so fast, and a policeman came and took the bobbin' man.'"

Dutchy paused for a moment and looked about at the cynical faces of his auditors. Then he went on in a lower tone:

"I suppose you are asking yourselves, Who the deuce put the little thing up to this trick? I asked the same question. Byrnes looked at me as if he could take my head off for a minute, and the Sergeant shuffled around a little, while I quietly retired. Byrnes looked down at the little thing on his knee and asked, just as if it were the most natural question in the world, why she had come to tell him about it. She said the nurse told

her that they would hang that man for robbing, that that was the way they did with such men. Everybody was talking about the robbery.

"'I just knew it was the wrong man they was goin' to hang,' and he did n't do it at all, and it made me awfully sorry, so sorry I cried.'

"The tears came into her eyes again as she recalled the horror of the wrong man being hung for the robbery, and Byrnes and the others seemed to sympathize with her.

"She went on to say that she had told her nurse about it, though she did n't dare to tell her father or mother for fearing of being punished. But the nurse was as bad as they and shut her up in the nursery all the next day for getting up in the night. It gave her a chance to think, however. She remembered that their coachman had gone to see Mr. Byrnes when his son Thomas had been taken away by a policeman, and Mr. Byrnes had let Thomas come home again. She thought if she went to see Mr. Byrnes perhaps he would save the bobbin' man from being hung, only she was afraid he 'd be hung before she got there if the nurse did n't let her out of the nursery pretty soon.

"The next day she got permission to go over to grandma's, and grandma had been easily persuaded to let her go out on the street to play a little while. As soon as she was free she set out to find Byrnes. She thought she would ask a policeman where he was, for she did n't

know. She thought the policemen would know where Mr. Byrnes lived, because they lived at the same place. But she had a pretty hard time making them understand. Finally she was put on a horse car and the conductor would n't let her get off for a long, long time. When she did get off she had to walk and walk and walk, and she asked a lot of policemen where Mr. Byrnes lived, and some of them did n't know at all. But at last she had got there, but she was so tired.

She began to look a little sleepy, but she was bound to know if the man would be sent home and not hung.

"'You need n't worry any more about it at all, little one,' said Byrnes in a low tone. 'We do n't hang men for robbery, but if it had n't been for your pluck he might have been shut up in prison for a long, long time.'

"'But he won't be shut up now?' she asked drowsily. 'I should n't like it a bit to be shut up for a long, long time.'

"'No, my dear, you 've saved that man a five years' term,' said Byrnes, looking steadily at her tired little form. She nestled up in his arms and her hand grasped his coat lappel. I said to myself, 'Poor thing, she 's tired all out, and no wonder!' Byrnes moved a trifle uneasily as if she were getting heavy in his arms, and tried to put her down. But it was useless: she was sound asleep."

As "Dutchy" finished, one of the others asked,

"And what do you suppose the motives of that child were? Did n't she simply get an idea into her head she could n't get out, which she had to go and tell? Do you call that unselfishness?"

"If a few more people got ideas of the same general sort into their heads that they could n't get out, I should n't complain of this world myself," answered "Dutchy" sulkily as he drew on his great coat and hurried away into the rainy night.

The original story begins, "Is Mr. Byrnes at home?" Such a phrase is odd, something calculated to attract passing attention. It is the newspaper report method of beginning, and is excellent for those who merely skim, as newspaper readers do. But when one takes up a short story he usually intends to read it all through. The first thing the reader of a short story wants to know is the location of the scene, the time, and the characters who are to figure. The first object in a story is to fix the scene in the mind of the reader as firmly as possible, and to do this the writer should begin with the most general details, and narrow steadily, though rapidly, down to the particular ones. This is the reason for

our putting the little description of the general surroundings in the introductory part, along with a statement of the idea that is intended to be brought out by the story. The idea and the incident should go side by side at equal rates.

In the opening of the story itself some changes will be noticed at the very outset. These first changes are calculated for the most part to make the child more attractive than she was in the original realistic description, in order that the reader may have his attention fixed the more securely on the character of the little girl. The addition of the fact that the young man forgot his errand and his desire to get away early to dinner when he saw the child, is exactly in this direction.

The conversation is changed slightly in the rewritten story for the purpose of making it more flexible. Conversation should not be an imitation of peculiarities observed in real life, but should be that which in the story has the best appearance of being easy and natural.

The fact that she looked tired and dusty is not mentioned in the original story. This observation shows more clearly than her own assertions how great an effort she made to reach the Superintendent. In the original she says she nearly got run over, but this is omitted because she is more full of her errand than of her own

perils. Her difficulties in reaching the Superintendent are therefore delayed until after she has told her story of the man she came to save.

In the succeeding paragraphs the narrative is followed along almost exactly in the order of events and as originally described. The changes that are made are chiefly to simplify the scene and to bring out the contrast between the child and the men, which is not clearly brought out in the first story, though it is a perfectly legitimate device to heighten the interest of the tale. Some of the description of the actual arrangement of things at Police Headquarters in New York, because few of the readers of the story will be likely to have any personal acquaintance with them, or any wish to have, while the stating of them in a realistic way detracts from the interest in the child, which is of greater importance to the effectiveness of the story. For instance, the paragraph at the end of the original story describing the office of Byrnes, while interesting as a matter of historical fact, has nothing whatever to do with the story of the little girl, indeed draws the interest away from that, and must accordingly be sacrificed wholly.

It will be noticed that the story though placed in the mouth of a newspaper reporter is told almost as if it were narrated by the author himself. There

are a few reminders in the use of language where the teller is viewed as an actor in the story, especially when he begins his narrative and when he hesitates and looks at his cynical auditors in the middle. But as a rule a character who is represented as telling a story should be a purely transparent medium. To try to bring out his character except in the introduction or conclusion is to detract from the real interest of the story that he tells. There can be but one commanding interest in a short story. The line of development of that interest must be perfectly straight, never wavering because of some interfering interest, however slight.

In the rewritten story, at the point when the little thing has told her story about the drunken man, the reporter is made to question her motive, or his auditors do for him. This is an excuse for bringing out more distinctly than could otherwise be done the impression of sincerity and singleness of purpose which the child had produced on the Superintendent and the others.

The question of motive is a vital one in a story, because every act must be shown to have been produced by a sufficient motive, or it jars. No sane person does anything in life without a motive, that is, some inner force that compels him. And the act and its motive are always exactly proportioned to each other.

In a story the proportion between motive and act must be most accurately maintained or the reader loses confidence. This question of motive is the question of knowledge of human nature. Without the knowledge the writer of a story, however skilful as a literary artist, must surely fail. Art is only the best way of using the fund of this knowledge of life which the author possesses. The necessity for his information being accurate and wide and deep is indicated in the introduction to this volume, where Zola pleaas for a scientific knowledge of human nature as a basis for art. In this story the whole interest depends on the study of motive. First, the story is made to turn on the inquiry whether men are moved by selfish or unselfish motives in all cases. The writer must understand exactly how they are moved by motive, and he must never make his characters do anything without just the right motive. All through the rewritten story an effort is made to make the motive of the child clear. The test of the success of this balancing of motive is the unbiassed impression of the ordinary reader. If he is satisfied, the story is probably accurate in its knowledge of motive and action. If the ordinary reader is vaguely troubled in spite of the fact that the story seems interesting and artistic to him, the author may conclude that unconsciously the reader has felt a discrepancy between

action and motive at some point. The reader does not of course analyze in this way, but the author should understand the reader's vague unrest on this principle of motive.

The student may ask why the story changes near the end of the little girl's narrative from the conversational style to the plain narrative. The reason is very simple, but one very essential to understand. At this point the reader will begin to grow tired. Too much of any one thing, whatever it may be, tires. Up to this point there has been a great deal of conversation. The reader will tire of it, and unless he is refreshed by some change he will lose interest in the story. The narrative form is both simpler and easier to follow, and more condensed. Young writers who use the conversational method well, often do not know when to stop and take up the narrative style. These two styles are almost equally important and necessary, and must be balanced against each other with skill. The narrative is perhaps the most difficult to handle well because it is the simplest. The balancing of these two styles much resembles the use of tragedy and comedy in a play. A little seriousness must be introduced into a comedy lest it become too light, and a little comedy must relieve the strain of tragedy. Dialogue and narrative are used with each other for a similar purpose.

At the close of the story the child is made to fall asleep in the arms of the Superintendent as a fitting climax to the effort she has made. It shows as nothing else could do how difficult her undertaking was, and consequently how genuine her motive. Had it been less real she would have yielded to her physical weariness long before and become lost or gone home.

The short extra conclusion is made necessary by the opening scene, and helps set off the story by introducing a doubt of the child's motive,--a line of dark to bring out the light.

Of course it is not known what actually took place in the original incident. In building up the story two methods may be followed. One is the method of the story as first presented, namely to describe the incident as nearly as it probably happened as possible, making it a page from unwritten history, using such art as historians are allowed, such as Macaulay uses, for instance. The method followed in the rewritten form of the story is to be true to the principle and motive first of all, and to modify the probable actual facts to some extent in such a way as to make more vivid to the reader the vital principles of human nature. The one is an effort to reproduce the world as it is; the other attempts to create a little world on the principles of the real world, but complete in itself.

VII.

Contrast.

In story writing contrast is far more than a figure of speech: it is an essential element in making the strength of any story. A story without contrast may have all the elements of construction, style, and originality of idea, but it will be weak, narrow, limp. The truth is, contrast is the measure of the breadth of one's observation. We often think of it as a figure of speech, a method of language which we use for effect. A better view of it is as a measure of breadth. You have a dark, wicked man on one side, and a fair, sunny, sweet woman on the other. These are two extremes, a contrast, and they include all between. If a writer understands these extremes he understands all between, and if in his story he sets up one type against another he in a way marks those extremes out as the boundaries of his intellectual field, and he claims all within them. If the contrast is great, he claims a great field, if feeble, then he has only a narrow field.

Contrast and one's power of mastering it indicate one's breadth of thought and especially the breadth of one's thinking in a particular story. Every writer should strive for the greatest possible breadth, for the greater his breadth the more people there are who will be interested in his work. Narrow minds interest a few people, and broad minds interest

correspondingly many. The best way to cultivate breadth is to cultivate the use of contrast in your writing.

But to assume a breadth which one does not have, to pass from one extreme to another without perfect mastery of all that lies between, results in being ridiculous. It is like trying to extend the range of the voice too far. One desires a voice with the greatest possible range; but if in forcing the voice up one breaks into a falsetto, the effect is disastrous. So in seeking range of character expression one must be very careful not to break into a falsetto, while straining the true voice to its utmost in order to extend its range.

Let us now pass from the general contrast of characters and situations of the most general kind to contrasts of a more particular sort. Let us consider the use of language first. Light conversation must not last too long or it becomes monotonous, as we all know. But if the writer can pass sometimes rapidly from light conversation to serious narrative, both the light dialogue and the serious seem the more expressive for the contrast. The only thing to be considered is, Can you do it with perfect ease and grace? If you cannot, better to let it alone. Likewise the long sentence may be used in one paragraph, and a fine contrast shown by using very short sentences in the next.

But let us distinguish between variety and contrast. The writer may pass from long sentences to short ones when the reader has tired of long ones, and vice versa, he may pass from a tragic character to a comic one in order to rest the mind of the reader. In this there will be no very decided contrast. But when the two extremes are brought close together, are forced together perhaps, then we have the electric effect of contrast. To use contrast well requires great skill in the use of language, for contrast means passing from one extreme to another in a very short space, and if this passing is not done gracefully, the whole effect is spoiled.

What has been said of contrast in language, character, etc., may also be applied to contrasts in any small detail, incident, or even simile. Let us examine a few of the contrasts in Maupassant, for he is a great adept in the use of contrast.

Let us take the opening paragraph of "The Necklace" and see what a marvel of contrast it is: "She was one of those pretty and charming girls who are sometimes, as if by a mistake of destiny, born in a family of clerks. She had no dowry, no expectations, no means of being known, understood, loved, wedded, by any rich and distinguished man; and she had let herself be married to a little clerk in the Ministry of Public Instruction."

Notice "pretty and charming",--"family of clerks". These two contrasted ideas (implied ideas, of course) are gracefully linked by "as if by a mistake of destiny." Then the author goes on to mention what the girl did not have in a way that implies that she ought to have had all these things. She could not be wedded to "any rich and distinguished man": "she let herself be married to a little clerk."

The whole of the following description of Mme. Loisel is one mass of clever contrast of the things she might have been, wanted to be, with what she was and had. A little farther on, however, we get a different sort of contrast. Though poor she has a rich friend. Then her husband brings home an invitation at which he is perfectly delighted. Immediately she is shown wretched,--a striking contrast. He is shown patient; she is irritated. She is selfish in wishing a dress and finery; he is unselfish in giving up his gun and the shooting.

With the ball the author gives us a description of Mme. Loisel having all she had dreamed of having. Her hopes are satisfied completely, it appears, until suddenly, when she is about to go away, the fact of her lack of wraps contrasts tellingly with her previous attractiveness. These two little descriptions, one of the success of the ball one of hurrying away in shame, the wretched cab, and all, are most forceful

contrasts, and most skilfully and naturally represented. The previous happiness is further set into contrast by the utter wretchedness she experiences upon discovering the loss of the necklace.

Then we have her new life of hard work, which we contrast in mind not only with what she had really been having, but with that which she had dreamed of having, had seemed about to realize, and had suddenly lost forever.

Then at last we have the contrast, elaborate, strongly drawn and telling, between Mme. Loisel after ten years, with her friend, who represents in flesh and blood what she might have been. Then at the end comes the short, sharp contrast of paste and diamonds, and the contrast that is suggested by the fact that this rich friend had used paste, rich though she was, and Mme. Loisel with all her poverty had actually bought and paid for diamonds.

In using contrast one does not have to search for something to set up against something else. Every situation has a certain breadth, it has two sides, whether they are far apart or near together. To give the real effect of the story it is necessary to pass from one side to the other very rapidly and frequently, for only in so doing can one keep the whole situation in mind. One must see the whole story, both sides and all in between,

within one's real powers.

at the same time. The more of a story one sees at the same time, the more of life one grasps and the more invigorating is the story. The use of contrast is eminently a matter of acquired skill, and when one has become skilful he uses contrast consciously and with the same effort that he makes his choice of words. In writing gracefully and easily, one must work hard on the task of finding suitable words and phrases. So one must work constantly in the effort to keep both sides of the story clearly before the mind of the reader all the time. When one is interested in one theme it is hard to pass quickly and readily to another, and it takes a decided effort of mind to do it: it is real work. It is like running from one side of a field to the other with lightning rapidity, back and forth, back and forth. The whole field gets trampled down smooth and hard, but it takes a vast amount of work to do it.

Though it is necessary constantly to bring tho two sides of the scene or the situation or the story together, there must never be any flagging on account of weariness, there must be no forcing, no stumbling or awkwardness. Contrasts which are not well done are better not done at all. One should try constantly and arduously, but whenever the result is not satisfactory the passage should be cut out ruthlessly, and something simpler that is satisfactory put in its place. The great secret of success is to do one's utmost without ever trying to do more than lies within one's real powers.

VIII.

Motive.

Every short story is more or less a study of human motive. In a law court it is understood that a knowledge of the motive is necessary in order to establish a crime. This involves the conclusion that no human act can be rightly understood without the motive which led to it as well as the deed itself. In a story of mystery the motive, or original cause, is looked for, but proves veiled. A Mystery story is valuable, however, in proportion to the investigation into the motive or compelling cause of the action. The word motive is commonly used of acts of human beings, but in a broader sense it may be used to designate the determining cause of any action.

The newspaper reporter commonly gives only a report of the facts in a given case. But the artistic story-teller, the writer of true literature, must look far deeper than this. He must make a study of life to determine the motive of the things done, to find out the original compelling cause, or perhaps the negative conditions which made a certain experience possible. Certain incidents may happen to a character. That character is affected in a certain way, and a study of the reasons of this comes under the head of motive just as much as for instance a study of the conditions which made a certain man do a certain thing to somebody.

The word motive is used in English in a much more restricted sense than we have indicated here, and hence the French word motif has come into use in this connection to designate that wide significance of the English word when employed in the technical sense. The motif of a story is the thought, idea, force, whatever it may be which makes the action possible: it is the compelling force behind everything.

One of the great failings of young writers is that they do not seize the motif of a story at the start, and indeed they do not bring it out at all except by implication. The important element of every story is its motif, and this must be brought out clearly in the opening sentences, or within a page or two. Time, place, and circumstances must be indicated in some way first, with a little designation of the chief character. All this may be accomplished in a single word, at most in a sentence or two. Then the author should take hold of the motif, or the motive which makes the man act, or the force which brought about the catastrophe, whatever it was, and this must be clearly explained. There can be no vital interest in the story until it is explained. There are many ways of explaining it, or in making it clear, among others the mere atmosphere of the language used. To illustrate, let us examine the motif of the stories in "The Odd Number."

In Happiness the motif is sounded in the third paragraph, beginning "We talked of love." That is the motive. In A Coward the motif of cowardice is indicated in the title first, and is then brought out clearly by the contrast in the third paragraph, which describes the man's gallant bearing and his skill as a fencer and pistol-shot. The motif of The Wolf is also found in the third paragraph, especially in the word 'slaughter,' which implies the passions which go with slaughter. The Necklace is a story about vanity, and this is indicated in the third paragraph, which begins, "She suffered ceaselessly, feeling herself born for all the delicacies and all the luxuries." In A Piece of String the first six paragraphs are introductory description, but in the seventh paragraph we have the peculiar actions of Maitre Hauchecorne when he picks up the piece of string, which gives a glimpse into his character in a way to show what element of his nature brought about the catastrophe. In La Mere Sauvage we have the motif indicated in the description of the bare ruin of the house in the fifth paragraph. The motif of the story Moonlight is found in the fifth paragraph, describing the Abbe's hatred of women and love.

Maupassant is rather more particular and exact about his motif than any other writer, and we know of no particular

reason why it should always come in the third, fifth, or seventh paragraphs: it must come early in the story, however.

But not only must every story have its motif, its motive, but every act in every story must have its motive clearly indicated. The writer should ceaselessly ask the question, Did this man or that woman have a sufficient motive for doing this or that deed?

Story writing seems at first very simple, but when the would-be author considers that in order to write good stories he must so thoroughly understand human nature that he will know exactly what and how great a motive is necessary for a certain act for a certain person under given circumstances, then the enormous requirements are seen at last. Even the best of writers fail constantly in this matter of understanding how much motive or how little corresponds to a given act, and they fail of the highest success just in proportion to that. But to succeed at all a writer must be constantly striving toward perfect knowledge.

For instance, it means nothing to give a description of how one man knocked another down unless the reason for his doing so is also clearly explained. To tell how a man met a woman on the street and kissed her is ridiculous unless some motive is given. More than this, the motive must be exactly proportioned to the act, and nicely calculated for the nature. A person of reserve would have

to be given a much stronger motive for any overt act than an unrestrained, impulsive person. Human nature works on just the same principles as physical nature: to drive a nail into hard wood requires more force than to drive it into soft wood, and when one attempts to drive a nail into a granite rock the nail is broken rather than being driven at all. The skilled carpenter in driving a nail calculates with great precision just what blows are required to drive his nail, and he never tries to drive a nail where it won't go. The same skill and precision should be used by the writer when he tries to drive human souls: he must supply exactly the right amount of motive.

To determine this question of motive a great deal of careful thinking is required, and this requirement as to a great amount of careful thinking in regard to motive is the reason why so much time is required for the development in the author's own mind of the story which he gets first in the form of a plain narrative of facts. It is always necessary for him to think out all the motives. This involves thinking out with great precision the exact nature of the characters, for motive must be perfectly proportioned to resistance, that is to character and also to circumstances. Training, education, atmosphere, personality, social conditions, are all elements in this matter of a nice adjustment of action and reac-

tion, of motive and act, of motif and catastrophe.

This knowledge of human nature is something we cannot presume to teach. This chapter can but show where knowledge of human nature must come in and form the all esstential element of strength in a story. It is an infinite vista that is opened, but all writers who succeed will penetrate it more or less deeply according to their genius.

IX.

How To Observe Men and Women.

Although the study of character has no bearing on the art of fiction as an art, it is a matter of great practical importance to the man or woman who would write fiction: hence we may be pardoned a word as to the best method of studying character.

In going about observing men and women it is indispensable that the student of human nature should classify, and the best method of classifying those you see is by comparison with friends you know well. You know a fine old gentleman, a lovely, unselfish woman, a selfish, disagreeable woman, etc. You have an ideal of childhood, of intellectuality, of stupidity, incarnate in some one you know. Take that person as in a way a type, and place him at the head of your classification. Then observe how often you find his leading characteristic in the thousands of others you may come in contact with in a year. This method of comparison leads you to separate characteristics from individuals, so that you can think of them as entities, as real, substantial things, though they at first seemed inseparable from the person in whom you had seen them. Not until you have seen the same characteristics in a great many persons do you come to know practically what a type is.

In writing fiction the special and

queer in human nature ought to be eliminated; for if you picture types your characters should be essentially like a great many other men and women in the world. When you have looked at but one person you cannot be sure how much is peculiar to him alone and how much is broad human nature. In order to know what is broadly human you must have observed a great many.

But you may ask when and where can you best observe human nature. The answer is, at all times and under all circumstances. Watch the faces you meet in the street until you come to know just what the ~~figure~~ character of a stranger is by your first glance at his face, figure, and general manner. Study the meaning of eyes, of voice, of gesture, ~~manner~~--~~mannerisms~~ as well as the meaning of the lines of the face. Short persons have certain qualities, tall persons certain others. Height, weight, color determine an almost infinite number of mental characteristics. Do not leave these broad and obvious things out of sight in observing smaller and finer shades of character.

The chief mistake that the careful student of life makes is to become so absorbed in the very small and fine in character that he forgets all about the broad and obvious . It is much better to know well the broad and obvious than the fine and delicate, for if one is a

shrewd observer of the larger things, he will be quite likely not to err in the smaller; but the reverse is not true.

The next step is in the study of human passions, and that observation must begin in one's own heart if one can be honest with one's self. How do your moods come and go? How does anger or joy or eagerness affect you? If you look carefully you will find yourself doing a thousand little things you were never before conscious of, and it is these little unconscious things which indicate the inward condition. To say that your heroine was proud and defiant is not half so effective as saying she tossed her head and stamped her foot and her eyes flashed defiant fire. A gesture, a glance, anything however small which one does unconsciously under stress is significant and telling.

What people tell you about themselves is seldom to be taken seriously. No doubt they try to be honest, and no doubt they think they understand themselves; but the opinion of a man about one he has just met is infinitely more likely to be true than anything he may say about himself.

This suggests another point: it is difficult to analyze the character of an intimate friend. Look for real information as to human character in the first vivid impressions you receive from one you have never met before. The

salient characteristics stand out then: those of your friend have been blunted in your mind by association and involved in a great confusion and complication, while in the case of a stranger you do not know too much to understand clearly. In writing it is seldom safe to write about things you know very well, because your store of information is so great it is difficult to choose. If you have a few vivid impressions they are more easily and satisfactorially handled in a story.

It is a trick of observers of life to see in others their own peculiar defects. This does not come from vanity, but is a sort of curious optical delusion or illusion, and we mention it here simply to impress the young student with the fact that every observation to be valuable has to be corrected, so to speak; it must be examined to find out how much of the original impression was personal to the observer and how much really was true. There is always a small amount of what may be called prejudice in every impression, however clear-minded and fair one may be, and when one comes to write, this personal element shows itself disastrously unless one is very much on his guard.

Every writer ought to formulate for himself more or less completely a philosophy of life. He should arrange his thought about the universe into a system, so that he will feel clear as to what

God is, what love is, what the meaning of life is, what is to be looked into and known and what is to be left untouched by the human mind. This systematizing of all life may be very incomplete and impractical for any one but the particular owner of it; yet every writer ought to have a clear notion of just what he thinks about these things, in order to be perfectly steady in his delineation of motive. This philosophy of life will not be found in books or anywhere else outside of one's own mind. Each man must study it out for himself, but until he has come to some conclusion he is likely to have difficulty whenever he finds his characters in certain situations he has not fully considered. Just what the philosophy is matters much less than that one should have a very definite notion of what it is in his particular case.

The most important point about successful character study, however, is patience. It cannot be forced, and it frequently works itself out in the mind unconsciously. Certain impressions will lodge in your mind when you have seen some person, and not until weeks afterward will their presence be discovered. One cannot make a business of searching out these hidden things, for a search seldom reveals anything; but the natural processes of the desirous mind rarely leave anything hidden forever. This is the reason why no man ought to make the writ-

ing of ~~xxxxxxx~~ fiction his sole business, at least until he is well advanced in the art. One gets observations in the ordinary course of everyday life, and the more unconscious one is the more likely is he to get valuable impressions. A story grows in one's mind, too, far better when one's hands are engaged or one's mind is occupied in other directions. During the intervals of rest from business the mind takes up the realization of the character with freshness and eagerness,. If the mind works on character study more than a very short time, it grows weary and nothing valuable can be accomplished.

One always gets the best opportunities for studying character in the ordinary routine of some steady employment, whether it be that of a clerk in his office or a woman in her social obligations. It is best to choose a business, of course, in which one comes in contact with as many different people as possible, and it is also necessary to cultivate habits of sociability and sympathy with those about you if you are to draw out their real characters. Sympathy, sincerity, and honest eagerness are the very best tools one can have to open the treasure chests which contain the secrets of human life.

X.

The Test of Ability.

Two elements are needed for success in authorship; the chief is a thorough knowledge of the art of expression; the second, only less important, is an original talent, or sufficient personal qualifications. Many people will wonder why talent is put second and not first, for there is a popular impression that talent is pretty nearly everything. An old professor who was very wise and indeed very well known the world over, used to say to his class that each one had mental power enough to create a revolution, though he were the dullest man of them all; and he would illustrate his proposition by saying that any man could learn by constant daily practice during a sufficient period to hold his body straight out at arm's length at right angles with a ladder as he grasped one of the rungs. Likewise, there are very few indeed who do not have some ideas worth expression, if by sufficient study of the art they have learned to do it with force and effect.

It is always a question, however, how much work will be needed to accomplish the desired result, and the length of time that is needed, as well as the amount of effort, depends directly on one's natural ability. It becomes a very important problem to test one's ability, to know just what it is, and whether it

is worth developing in comparison with certain other talents. One should not waste time in learning to write if he can learn how to be a merchant more easily and surely. It is the purpose of this chapter to offer a few suggestions of a purely practical kind looking in this direction.

First, let us say that no one, whatever his talent, should think of making his living by writing pure literature, that is by fiction, poetry, or essays. Most have not the talent to succeed to the extent that this requires, and those who have the talent are very likely to spoil it by putting such an enormous burden on their shoulders. Whatever may be said to the contrary, those who seek a literary life, even of the highest kind, will find it decidedly to their advantage to enter journalism, or take up some editorial work, or otherwise undertake the business side of literature before trying to enter the ideal side. Many will find that literature is best pursued as a side issue with some other business. There is no reason in the world why journalism or editorial work or law ~~should~~ should seriously interfere with success in writing artistic fiction; on the contrary there is every reason in the world why in the end some such outside pursuit should aid very substantially one's success in pure literature, because such occupations open up the avenues by

which we come to understand human nature, to realize life truly, or in other words, these other pursuits enable us to accumulate in the best possible way the material we must use in making literature. The man or woman who devotes himself exclusively to literature is almost sure to become more or less morbid, and we venture to assert that the successful novelist of today who lives by his pen (though he may tell you quite the contrary himself) has a constant fight against morbidity, and one in which he is not always successful.

But having decided to devote a certain amount of one's time to writing of some sort, in most cases fiction, the young writer wishes to test his ability in some way. The simplest method is to go with one's work to a wise and sympathetic advisor, if you can find such a one, and let him tell you just what your strong points are and just what your weak ones. With this knowledge you can easily make up your mind as to the amount of time necessary to cure your defects, and whether your gifts warrant the effort.

But a wise and sympathetic advisor is the rarest thing in the world to find. There are plenty of advisors, but most of them know still less about you than you know about yourself, and in addition they for one reason or another will not or cannot tell you what they know. As a

matter of fact you must be your own advisor.

In order to test one's self one must be honest, and what is more, sincerity is the first great qualification for the writing of really valuable fiction. The public loves sincerity, and for the sake of sincerity will forgive almost any artistic defect.

Sincerity means truth of heart, both in reality and in portrayal, and good fiction is that which represents the heart truly.

The first great gift which the young author should covet is, then, sincerity, and for two reasons: first, it is one great talent (yes, a real talent, perhaps a genius); second, it is an absolute requisite to testing one's abilities.

Many will doubtless pass over this hastily, but the truth still remains that it is the first and chief qualification for success in the writing of fiction, and few are they who possess it in any marked degree.

The second qualification, the qualification which the man or woman who really sets out honestly to examine himself will look for, is the ability to follow a train of thought without outside aids. Many people can talk well, even brilliantly; but when alone they will not be able to think continuously or effectively. Some people would call this power imagination,

but the ability to think in images is not necessarily requisite to writing successfully. The writer who would succeed must have the habit of thinking, however, and people who do not like to meditate, whether in a dreamy and far away fashion, or in a purely practical and business fashion, will not be likely to write with any considerable power. Letter-writing as a gift usually goes with the ability to think, but sometimes those who do not like to write letters have a literary ability.

The third requisite for becoming a successful writer is the gift of language. We have mentioned this last of all because it is really the least important, strange as this may seem. Language can be acquired, but sincerity and meditativeness are very difficult of acquisition. We know a young man who until he was twenty appeared to lack the gift of language almost entirely, and thought this a fatal impediment to his becoming a successful writer. He set himself to acquire what command of words he could, however, and in the end became eminently proficient. Of course some people gain a command of language much more easily than others, but all must learn, and the brightest and dullest alike have the task of acquisition to be accomplished before they can be proficient writers.

To test one's command of language, how-

ever, one may first inquire whether he is a ready letter-writer or not. This is a vague test, for some people write voluminous letters who have not large command of language, and some people who have a command of language never write long letters. Yet these are exceptions to the rule that if one is a ready letter-writer one has a good command of language, and if one is not, that command is probably lacking as a natural gift. Letter-writing, however, does not indicate in any way one's acquired proficiency in the use of language, which comes only from long and thoughtful reading. If one has not done a very large amount of careful, thoughtful reading of the best literature he is not likely to have a trained style, however voluminously he may have written.

Verse-making is an admirable way of cultivating one's use of words, for it necessitates a great variety of expressive phrases as well as individual words for rhyming, and so forth, and is strongly recommended for practice and as a test.

Another good test of one's command of language, and also a good exercise, is to sit down quietly and alone after some interesting experience or observation and write out a description of it. If one is really interested in the subject the writing should be easy and expressive. Never try to write a description of

anything which does not really interest you, however, for unless you have a genuine interest there will be no test. A description of a conversation is a good test of one's power to write dialogue.

Having sincerity, the meditative habit, and a good command of language, one ought to be able to write in some way or other with real success. It is still an open question, however, what style of writing one should choose.

The simplest form of composition is essay-writing, and it is a fact that nearly all great novelists and indeed writers of all kinds, have begun with essay-writing, for instance writing book reviews for a local newspaper, or short articles describing some curious or interesting event, or little studies of interesting personalities. This is not essay-writing in the technical sense of the word, it is perhaps more accurately termed sketching in words. The artist begins to make outlines first, then draws careful pictures in black and white, and finally paints an elaborate picture in colors. A short story (that is, a thoroughly artistic short story) is a painting in color of a single figure. A novel is a painting of a group.

When one has mastered sketch-writing (and no young author should think for a moment of leaping at once into the finished work, though almost all do just this), he will wish to find out whether he has the ability to write an artistic

story. To ascertain this, let him ask, first, whether he understands the meaning of human motive, for fiction is a study of motive. If he has a deep and decided interest in human motive he may probably become a writer of short stories, or artistic fiction of some kind. Stories may be written in an essay style or the conversational style, and one should determine one's powers in this particular next. People with vivid imaginations will write character studies well, those with a philosophic turn of mind will write stories in the narrative, descriptive, essay style, but in any case a story ought to be a study of motive.

The style that one can write most easily is the best style to cultivate. Many people think that ~~xxxxxxxxxxx~~ what they do well and naturally and easily is a fault rather than otherwise. This is not the case, however, and if one has a particular facility for conversation, or character study, or philosophic writing he should cultivate it, restraining it when it becomes excessive and burdensome to be sure, but never giving it up as altogether bad. It is much better to learn to curb one's natural tendencies than create new abilities.

The secret of arriving at a satisfactory knowledge of one's abilities is to begin at a definite point and proceed from point to point. Ask first if you

are quite honest with yourself; then follow in order with the other questions we have proposed, making tests of various kinds until you are satisfied in your own mind. Study each point thoroughly, in order to find out whether you surely lack or surely possess a gift, and then consider whether you can by study and effort develop the lacking quality, or had best pursue some line in which it is not required. This habit of self-examination will not only give you reliable and necessary information about yourself, but it will develop that habit of mental investigation which is at the foundation of all valuable character study.

Conclusion.

But art must be forgotten before it can be useful. There are two perfect artists, the innocent and unconscious child (who is but the hand of divine intelligence), and the trained man of letters to whom art has become a second nature. Art is after all but a means. It should be the fluid medium through which heart speaks to heart. Literature is for the heart to live by,--if you would know its end and mission. If you would make others live, you must live yourself, yes, and die. You must coin your heart's blood into the universal coin of the realm of heart, so transmuting your pain into life for others. If you do that, art becomes but a paltry thing in comparison,--indeed it is only the way in which you perform your alchemy. Art is a means, never and end, and "Art for art's sake", or "L'Art pour l'art" as they call it more appropriately, is dilletantism pure and simple. Dilletantism may be a very good thing on occasion, but it is not for the dilletante that the practical instructions of this little book have been intended.

Rules may be applied to a subject before it is understood or mastered in order to get at the heart of the matter; and they may be applied to a work of art after it is finished in order to test it and show how to correct it. But while

one is constructing, while one is actually writing a story, rules are the most fatal thing to have in mind. This fact has no doubt been the great barrier to the existence of any formulation of the principles of literary art. But though the athlete must not think of dumb-bells and horizontal bars and his trainer when he is performing feats of dexterity on the trapeze a hundred feet above the ground, it would be utterly fatal for him to attempt anything dangerous or difficult without having first gone through all this conscious, painful training. Likewise with the literary artist: self-consciousness during the actual performance of the feat of writing a story is the most dangerous thing in the world; but there is no surer way of escaping it than by submitting first to a rigorous course of self-conscious preparation. Self-consciousness is sure to come sooner or later, and it must be met and overcome if failure is not to be deliberately invited. What safer plan is there than to meet it at once and systematically, and fortify one's art so thoroughly that there can be no surprises or unlooked for difficulties.

But as we said in the beginning, Art must be forgotten before it can be useful. "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing." The writer of fiction should master his art or abandon it.